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THE ROVER BOYS' IN CAMP

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

BOOK # 8

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Public Domain Series

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INTRODUCTION

My Dear Boys: "The Rover Boys in Camp" is a complete story in itself, but forms the eighth volume of "The Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

As I have mentioned before, when I started this line of stories I had in mind to make not more than three, or possibly four, volumes. But the publication of "Rover Boys at School," "Rover Boys on the Ocean," "Rover Boys in the Jungle," and "Rover Boys Out West" did not appear to satisfy my readers, and so I followed with "Rover Boys on the Great Lakes," "Rover Boys in the Mountains," and lastly with "Rover Boys on Land and Sea." But the publishers say there is still a cry for "more! more!" and so I now present to you this new Rover Boys book, which relates the adventures of Dick, Tom, and Sam, and a number of their old-time friends, at home, at dear old Putnam Hall, and in camp on Pine Island.

In writing this tale I have had in mind two thoughts—one to give my young readers an out-and-out story of jolly summer adventure, along with a little touch of mystery, and the other to show them that it very often pays to return good for evil. Arnold Baxter had done much to bring trouble to the Rover family, but what Dick Rover did in return was Christian-like in the highest meaning of that term. Dick was not a "goody-goody" youth, but he was a thoroughly manly one, and his example is well worth following by any lad who wishes to make something of himself.

Once more let me thank all of those who have expressed themselves as satisfied with the previous stories in this series. I earnestly trust the present volume will also prove acceptable to them, and will do them good.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD - 1904

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CHAPTER I

THE ROVER BOYS AT HOME

"All out for Oak Run!" shouted the brakeman of the train, as he thrust his head in through the doorway of the car. "Step lively, please!"

"Hurrah for home!" shouted a curly-headed youth of sixteen, as he caught up a small dress-suit case. "Come on, Sam."

"I'm coming, Tom," answered a boy a year younger. "Where is Dick?"

"Here I am," replied Dick Rover, the big brother of the others. "Just been in the baggage car, making sure the trunks would be put off," he added. "Say, but this looks natural, doesn't it, after traveling thousands of miles across the Pacific?"

"And across the Continent from San Francisco," put in Sam Rover.

"Do you know, I feel as if I'd been away for an age?"

"It's what we've gone through with that makes you feel that way, Sam," came from Tom Rover. "Just think of being cast away on a lonely island like Robinson Crusoe! Why, half the folks won't believe our story when they hear it."

"They'll have to believe it." Sam hopped down to the depot platform, followed by the others. "Wonder if the folks got that telegram I forwarded from Buffalo?"

"They must have, for there is Jack with the big carriage," said Tom, and walked over to the turnout he mentioned. "Hullo, Jack!" he called out. "How is everybody?"

"Master Tom!" ejaculated Jack Ness, the Rovers' hired man. "Back at last, are you, an' safe an' sound?"

"Sound as a dollar, Jack. How are the folks?"

"Your father is putty well, and so is your Uncle Randolph. Your Aunt Martha got so excited a-thinkin' you was coming hum she got a headache."

"Dear Aunt Martha!" murmured Tom. "I'll soon cure her of that." He turned to his brothers. "What shall we do about the trunks? We can't take 'em in the carriage."

"Aleck is comin' for them boxes," said the hired man. "There's his wagon now."

A box wagon came dashing up to the depot platform, with a tall, good-looking colored man on the seat. The eyes of the colored man lit up with pleasure when he caught sight of the boys.

"Well! well! well!" he ejaculated, leaping down and rushing forward. "Heah yo' are at las', bless you! I'se been dat worried 'bout yo' I couldn't 'most sleep fo' t'ree nights. An' jess to t'ink yo' was cast away on an island in de middle of dat Pacific Ocean! It's a wonder dem cannonballs didn't eat yo' up."

"Thanks, but we didn't meet any 'cannonballs,' Aleck, I am thankful to say," replied Dick Rover. "Our greatest trouble was with some mutineers who got drunk and wanted to run things to suit themselves. They might have got the best of us, but a warship visited the island just in the nick of time and rescued us."

"So I heared out ob dat letter wot yo' writ yo' father. An' to t'ink dat Miss Dora Stanhope and de Laning gals was wrecked wid yo'! It's wonderful!"

"It certainly was strange, Aleck. But, come, I am anxious to get home. Here are the trunk checks," and Dick passed the brasses over.

In a moment more the three boys had entered the carriage, along with Jack Ness. Tom insisted on driving, and away they went at a spanking gait, over Swift River, through the little village of Dexter's Corners, and then out on the road that led to Valley Brook farm.

As my old readers know, the Rover boys were three in number, as already introduced. They were the sons of Anderson Rover, a well-to-do gentleman, who was now living in retirement at Valley Brook, in company with his brother Randolph, and the latter's wife, Martha.

While Anderson Rover had been on a hunt for gold in the heart of Africa, the three boys had been sent by their Uncle Randolph to a military academy known as Putnam Hall. Here they made many friends and also a few enemies, the worst of the latter being Dan Baxter, a bully who wanted his way in everything. Baxter was the offspring of a family of low reputation, and his father, Arnold Baxter, was now in prison for various misdeeds.

The first term at school had been followed by an exciting chase on the ocean, after which the boys had gone with their uncle to the jungles of Africa, in a search after Anderson Rover. After the parent was found it was learned that Arnold Baxter was trying to swindle the Rovers out of a valuable gold mine in the far West, but this plot, after some exciting adventures, was nipped in the bud.

The trip West had tired the boys, and they hailed an outing on the Great Lakes with delight. During this outing they learned something about a treasure located in the heart of the Adirondack Mountains, and the next winter visited the locality and unearthed a box containing gold, silver, and precious stones, worth several thousands of dollars. During this treasure-hunt Dan Baxter did his best to bring the Rover boys to grief, but without success.

After the winter in the Adirondacks, the boys had expected to return at once to Putnam Hall to continue their studies. But three pupils were taken down with scarlet fever, and the academy was promptly closed by the master, Captain Victor Putnam.

"That gives us another holiday," Tom had said. "Let us put in the time by traveling," and, later on, it was decided that the boys should visit California for their health. This they did, and in the seventh volume of this series, entitled "The Rover Boys on Land and Sea," I related the particulars of how they were carried off to sea during a violent storm, in company with three of their old-time girl friends, Dora Stanhope and her cousins, Nellie and Grace Laning. It may be mentioned here that Dick thought Dora Stanhope the sweetest girl in the world, and Tom and Sam were equally smitten with Nellie and Grace Laning.

Being cast away on the Pacific was productive of additional adventures and surprises. On a ship that picked the girls and boys up they fell in again with Dan Baxter, and he did all in his power to make trouble for them. When all were cast away on a deserted island, Dan Baxter joined some mutineers among the sailors, and there was a fight which threatened to end seriously for our friends. But as luck would have it, a United States warship hove into sight, and from that moment the boys and girls, and the friends, who had stuck to them through thick and thin, were safe.

Before the warship left the island a search was made for Dan Baxter and for those who had mutinied with him. But the bully and his evil-minded followers kept out of sight, and so they were left behind to shift for themselves.

"Do you think that we will ever see Dan Baxter again?" Sam had questioned.

"I hardly think so," had been Dick's reply. But in this surmise the elder Rover boy was mistaken, as later events will prove.

The journey across the Pacific to San Francisco was accomplished without incident. As soon as the Golden Gate was reached the boys, and also the girls, sent telegrams to their folks, telling them that all was well.

Mrs. Stanhope was staying at Santa Barbara for her health. All of the girls had been stopping with her, and now it was decided that Dora, Nellie, and Grace should go to her again.

"It's too bad we must part," Dick had said, as he squeezed Dora's hand. "But you are coming East soon, aren't you?"

"In a month or two, yes. And what will you do?"

"Go back to Putnam Hall most likely—if the scarlet fever scare is over."

"Then we'll be likely to see you again before long," and Dora smiled her pleasure.

"It will be like old times to get back to the Hall again," Sam had put in. "But first, I want to go home and see the folks."

"Right you are," had come from Tom. "I reckon they are dead anxious to see us, too."

And so they had parted, with tight hand-squeezing and bright smiles that meant a good deal. One train had taken the girls southward to Santa Barbara, and another had taken the boys eastward to Denver and to Chicago. At the latter city the lads had made a quick change, and twenty-six hours later found them at Oak Run, and in the carriage for the farm.

CHAPTER II

NEWS OF INTEREST

"My boys! my boys!"

Such was the cry given by Anderson Rover, when he caught sight of the occupants of the carriage, as the turnout swept up to the piazza of the comfortable farm home.

"Home again! Home again
Safe from a foreign shore!"

sang out Tom, and leaping to the ground, he caught his father around the shoulders. "Aren't you glad to see us, father?" he went on.

"Glad doesn't express it, Tom," replied the fond parent, as he embraced first one and then another. "My heart is overflowing with joy, and I thank God that you have returned unharmed, after having passed through so many grave perils. How brown all of you look!"

"Tanned by the tropical sun," answered Sam. "Oh, here is Aunt Martha, and Uncle Randolph!"

"Sam!" burst out the motherly aunt, as she kissed him. "Oh, how you must have suffered on that lonely island!" And then she kissed the others.

"We've certainly had our fill of adventures," came from Dick, who was shaking hands with his Uncle Randolph. "And more than once we thought we should never see Valley Brook farm again."

"We were real Robinson Crusoes," went on Sam. "And the girls were Robinson Crusoes, too."

"Are the girls well?" questioned Mrs. Rover.

"Very well, auntie. If they hadn't been we shouldn't have parted with them in San Francisco. They went back to Santa Barbara to finish their vacation."

"I see. Well, it certainly was a wonderful trip. You'll have to tell us all the particulars this evening. I suppose you are as hungry as bears just now. Tom is, I'm sure."

"Oh, Aunt Martha, I see you haven't forgotten my failing," piped in the youth mentioned, with a twinkle in his eye. "And do I get pie for dinner?"

"Yes, Tom, and all you care to eat, too. We are going to make your home-coming a holiday."

"Good!"

They were soon in the house, every nook and corner of which was so familiar to them. They rushed up to their rooms, and, after a brushing and a washing up, came down to the big dining room, where the table fairly groaned with good things.

"Gosh! this is a regular Christmas spread!" observed Tom, as he looked the table over. "Tell you what, Aunt Martha, I'm going to be cast away every week after this."

"Oh, Tom, don't speak of it! After this you must stay right here. Neither your father nor your uncle nor myself will want to leave you out of sight."

"Pooh! We can't stay home. But we'll be careful of our trips in the future, you can be sure of that."

"Have you heard anything about Putnam Hall since we went away?" asked
Dick, during the meal.

"The academy opened again last week, Dick," answered his father. "We received a circular letter from Captain Putnam. The scarlet fever scare did not amount to much, for which the captain is very thankful."

"I sent him a telegram, stating we were safe," said Sam. "I knew he would like to hear from us. The captain is a brick."

"The best ever," said Tom, with his mouth full of chicken.

"And ditto, Mr. Strong," put in Dick, referring to the head assistant at the Hall.

"Exactly, Dick. But no more Jasper Grinders in mine," went on Tom, referring to a tyrannical teacher who had caused them much trouble, and who had been discharged from the academy, as already mentioned in "The Rover Boys in the Mountains."

"Or Josiah Crabtrees," said Dick, referring to another teacher, who had been made to leave Putnam Hall, and who had wanted to marry the widow Stanhope, in an endeavor to get control of the money that was coming to Dora. Crabtree's misdeeds had landed him in prison, where he was likely to stay for some time to come.

While the meal was still in progress the boys began the recital of their many adventures, and this recital was kept up until a late hour. It was astonishing how much they had to tell, and how interesting it proved to the listeners.

"You might make a book of it," said Anderson Rover. "It equals our adventures in the jungles of Africa."

"I am going to write it out some day," answered Dick. "And, maybe, I'll get the story printed. The trouble is, I can't end the tale properly."

"How is that, Dick?" asked his Uncle Randolph. "You were all saved. Isn't that a proper ending for any book?"

"Yes, but what of the villain? Baxter didn't show himself, and that is no ending at all. He should have fallen over a cliff, or been shot, or something like that."

"And we should have married the three girls," put in fun-loving Tom. "That would make the story even more complete."

"Well, things do not happen in real life as they do in story books," said the parent. "It is likely you will never hear of Dan Baxter again. But we may hear from his father."

"His father!" exclaimed the three youths in concert.

"Why, Arnold Baxter is in prison," added Sam.

"He was, up to five days ago, when they took him to the hospital to undergo some sort of an operation. At the hospital the operation was postponed for a day, and during the night he slipped away from the institution and disappeared."

"Well, I never!" burst out Dick. "Isn't he the slick one, though! Just when you think you've got him hard and fast, you haven't at all."

"Haven't they any trace of him?" asked Sam.

"None, so far as I have heard. There was a report that he had gone to New York and taken passage on a ship bound for Liverpool, but at present the ship is on the Atlantic, so the authorities can do nothing."

"I hope they catch him."

"We all hope that, Sam."

For a few days the three boys did nothing but take it easy. It was pleasant weather, and they roamed around the farm in company with their father and their uncle, or with Alexander Pop, the colored man of work. As my old readers know, Pop had been in former days a waiter at Putnam Hall, and Dick, Tom, and Sam had befriended him on more than one occasion, for which he was extremely grateful.

"Yo' boys is jes' naturally fust-class heroes," said Aleck one day. "Even if dem cannonballs had cum after yo', I don't t'ink da could have cotched yo', no, sirree!"

"It's a pity you weren't along, Aleck," answered Tom.

"I can't say as to dat, Master Tom. I got 'bout all de hair-raisin' times I wanted when we was in de jungles ob Africy. I'se only sorry ob one t'ing."

"And what is that?"

"Dat you didn't jes' go an' frow dat Dan Baxter overboard from dat ship de fust time yo' sot eyes on him. Suah as yo' am born he'll turn up some day to make moah trouble."

"Well, if he turns up we'll be ready for him," returned Tom grimly.

"How can yo' be ready fo' a pusson wot acts like a snake in de grass? He'll sting befo' yo' hab de chance to spot him."

"We'll have to keep our eyes open, Aleck," answered the youth; and then the subject was changed.

During those days the boys went fishing and bathing in the river, and also visited Humpback Falls, that spot where Sam had had such a thrilling adventure, as related in "The Rover Boys at School."

"What a lot has happened since those days," said Sam, taking a deep breath. "Tom, do you remember how you got into trouble with old Crabtree the very first day we landed at Putnam Hall?"

"I do, Sam; and do you remember our first meeting, on the boat, with Dan Baxter, and how we sent him about his business when he tried to annoy Nellie, and Grace, and Dora?"

"Yes, indeed. Say, I am getting anxious to get back to the Hall. It seems almost like a second home."

"So am I," put in Dick. "Besides, we have lost time enough from our studies. We'll have to pitch in, or we'll drop behind our classes."

"Father says we can return to the Hall next Monday, if we wish."

"I vote we do so."

"So do I."

And thus it was decided that they should return to the academy four days later.

But during those four days something was to happen which would have an important bearing upon their future actions.

CHAPTER III

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

The next day, shortly after noon, it began to rain, and the storm increased in violence until the wind blew almost a gale.

The rain kept the boys indoors, at which Tom was inclined to grumble.

"No use of grumbling, Tom," said Dick cheerfully. "Let us improve the time by looking over our school books. That will make it easier to slip into the grind again when we get back to the Hall."

"That is excellent advice, Richard," said Randolph Rover. "Whatever you do, do not neglect your studies."

"By the way, Uncle Randolph, how is scientific farming progressing?" said Tom, referring to something that had been his uncle's hobby for years—a hobby that had cost the gentleman considerable money.

"Well—ah—to tell the truth, Thomas, not as well as I had hoped for."

"Hope you didn't drop a thousand or two this year, uncle?"

"Oh, no—not over fifty dollars."

"Then you got off easy."

"I shall do better next year. The potatoes already show signs of improvement."

"Good! I suppose you'll be growing 'em on top of the ground soon. Then you won't have the bother of digging 'em, you know," went on the fun-loving boy innocently.

"Absurd, Thomas! But I shall have some very large varieties, I feel certain."

"Big as a watermelon?"

"Hardly, but—"

"Big as a muskmelon, then?"

"Not exactly, but—"

"About the size of a cocoanut, eh?"

"No! no! They will be as large as—"

"I mean a little cocoanut," pleaded Tom, while Sam felt like laughing outright.

"Well, yes, a little cocoanut. You see—"

"We saw some big potatoes in California, Uncle Randolph."

"Ah! Of what variety?"

"*Cornus bustabus*, or something like that. Sam, what was the name, do you know?"

"That must be something like it, Tom," grinned the youngest Rover.

"Took two men to lift some of those potatoes," went on Tom calmly.

"Two men? Thomas, surely you are joking."

"No, uncle, I am telling nothing but the strict truth."

"But two men! The potatoes must have been of monstrous size!"

"Oh, not so very big. But they did weigh a good deal, no question of it."

"Think of two men lifting one potato!"

"I didn't say one potato, Uncle Randolph. I said some of those potatoes."

"Eh?"

"The men had a barrel full of 'em."

"Thomas!" The uncle shook his finger threateningly. "At your old tricks, I see. I might have known it." And then he stalked off to hide his chagrin.

"Tom, that was rather rough on Uncle Randolph," said Sam, after a laugh.

"So it was, Sam. But I've got to do something. This being boxed up, when one might be fishing or swimming, or playing baseball, is simply dreadful," answered the other.

Just before the evening meal was announced Jack Ness came up from the barn, and sought out Randolph Rover.

"Found a man slinking around the cow-shed a while ago," he said. "He looked like a tramp. I wanted to talk to him, but he scooted in double-quick order."

"Humph! We haven't had any tramps here in a long time," came from Randolph Rover. "Where did he go to?"

"Down toward the berry patch."

"Did you follow him up?"

"I did, sir, but he got away from me."

"You must keep a close watch for those fellows," said Randolph Rover bluntly. "I don't want any of them getting in our barn and burning it down to the ground."

"You are right, Randolph," said Anderson Rover. "Make them keep away from the place by all means, Jack."

"I'll keep my eye peeled for 'em," answered the hired man.

The wind was now blowing a gale, causing the trees near the farmhouse to creak and groan, and banging more than one shutter. But the boys did not mind this, and went to bed promptly at the usual hour.

"A storm like this on land is nothing to one on the sea," was the way Tom expressed himself. "I don't like anything better than to listen to the whistling of the wind when I am snug in bed."

For the time being Sam and Tom were occupying a room in the L of the farmhouse, and Dick had a small bedchamber adjoining. The boys were soon undressed, and, having said their prayers, hopped into bed, and were soon sound asleep.

It was not until half an hour later that the older folks retired. Anderson Rover was the last to leave the sitting room, where he had been busy writing some letters at the desk that stood there.

As he was about to retire he fancied he heard a noise outside of one of the windows. He drew up the curtain and looked through the glass, but could see nothing.

"It must have been the wind," he murmured. "But, somehow, it didn't sound like it."

As he stepped into the dark hallway an uneasy feeling took possession of him—a feeling hard to define, and one for which he could not account.

"I think I had better go around and see that all the doors and windows are properly locked," he told himself. "Brother Randolph may have overlooked one of them."

He walked the length of the hallway, and stepped into the kitchen and over to a side window.

As he had his hand on the window-latch he heard a quick step directly behind him.

He started to turn, but before he could do so he received a blow on the head from a club that staggered him. Then he was jerked backward to the floor.

"Silence!" muttered a voice close to his ear. "Don't you dare to make a sound!"

"What does this mean—" he managed to gasp.

"Silence, I tell you!" was the short answer. "If you say another word, I will hit you again!"

Having no desire to receive a blow that might render him totally unconscious, or, perhaps, take his life, Anderson Rover said no more. He heard a match struck, and then a bit of a tallow candle was lit and placed on the edge of the kitchen table.

By this dim light the father of the Rover boys saw standing over him a tall man, beardless, and with his head closely cropped. One glance into that hardened face sufficed to tell him who the unwelcome visitor was.

"Arnold Baxter!"

"I see you recognize me," was the harsh reply. "Not so loud, please, unless you want that crack I promised you."

"What brings you here, and at such an hour as this?"

"I find it more convenient to travel during the night than in the daytime."

"The police are on your track."

"I know that as well you, Rover."

"What do you want here?"

"What does any man want when he has been stripped of all his belongings? I want money."

"I have none for you."

"Bosh! Do you think I have forgotten how you and your boys swindled me out of my rights to that mine in the far West?"

"We did not swindle you, Baxter. The claim was lawfully mine."

"I can't stop to argue the question, and I don't want you to talk so loud, remember that. No, don't try to get up," went on the midnight visitor, as Anderson Rover attempted to rise. "Stay just where you are."

He was feeling in his pocket, and now he brought forth a strip of cloth, with a knot tied in the middle.

It was a gag, and he started to place it in Anderson Rover's mouth, when the latter leaped up and began to struggle with all the force he could command.

"Stop, I tell you!" cried Arnold Baxter softly.

"Stop!" And then, catching up his club once more, he dealt Anderson Rover another blow, this time directly across the temple. The gentleman wavered for an instant, gave a deep groan, and fell like a log to the floor.

CHAPTER IV

A USELESS PURSUIT

Half an hour later Tom awoke with a start. For the moment he could not tell what had aroused him. Then he remembered hearing the slam of a door or a window sash.

"Must have been the storm," he told himself, and was about to turn over and go to sleep when he heard a gun-shot from the direction of the barn.

"Something is wrong, that's certain!" he cried. "Sam, wake up!"

"What's the row, Tom?" questioned the youngest brother sleepily.

Before Tom could reply they heard Dick getting up, and also their Uncle
Randolph and Aunt Martha.

"What did that shot mean?" demanded Randolph Rover, coming toward the boys' rooms. "Did any of you fire it?"

"No, it came from outside," returned Torn. "Hark!"

"Hullo, in the house!" came in the voice of Jack Ness. "Wake up, everybody! Something is wrong!"

After this it did not take long for those upstairs to slip into some clothing, and go below. Randolph Rover ran to the side door, to find it wide open. Dick lit the hall lamp.

"Saw a man running across the garden," said Jack Ness, who had his shot-gun with him. "I yelled to him to stop, and then fired the gun. I think he came from the house."

"How did you happen to be up?" asked Sam.

"One of the horses is sick, and I was attending to him."

By this time some of the others were looking into the various rooms.

"The desk has been broken open!" cried Dick. "And the pantry in the corner, too!"

"Mercy, save us!" shrieked Mrs. Rover, from the kitchen. "Come here at once. Poor Anderson has been killed!"

"Killed!" gasped Tom; and then all ran to the kitchen as quickly as they could.

They found Anderson Rover lying where he had fallen, and still unconscious. There was a lump on his forehead, and a thin stream of blood trickled down one side of his face.

"Thank heaven, he is not dead!" murmured Dick, as he knelt beside his father. "But he has been struck some cruel blows. Somebody fetch water and a bandage."

The water was procured, and also a bandage, and under skillful treatment, Anderson Rover was presently restored to consciousness.

"Where—where is he?" he questioned, when he could speak.

"Do you mean the person who struck you down?" asked Dick.

"Ye—yes."

"I don't know. Got away, I guess."

"The villain! He attacked me most foully!"

"I saw him running across the garden," put in the hired man. "Did he steal anything?"

"To be sure he stole something," said Sam. "He ransacked the whole lower floor, by the looks of things."

"Wonder who it was?" put in Tom.

"It was Arnold Baxter," answered his father.

"Arnold Baxter!" cried the others in chorus.

"Are you certain?" asked Dick.

"Yes. He struck me down, and then lit the bit of tallow candle you see lying there. Then we struggled, and he hit me again, and that is all I know. But I am sure it was Baxter, for I spoke to him. He accused us of having robbed him of that mine out West."

"Was he alone?" asked Randolph Rover.

"I saw no one else."

"We ought to follow him up," declared Tom, now that he realized his father was not so badly hurt as at first feared.

"That's the talk!" ejaculated Dick. "Wait till I get my pistol."

"Boys, do keep out of harm," pleaded Mrs. Rover. "Remember that this
Arnold Baxter is a desperate criminal."

"We are not afraid of him," answered Tom.

"We'll show him that he can't come here and attack father," added Sam.

Leaving their father in the care of their Aunt Martha, the three Rover boys armed themselves and sallied forth, accompanied by their uncle and Alexander Pop, the latter carrying a horse-pistol of the old-fashioned variety.

"Dat dar Baxter am a rascal of de fust water," was Aleck's comment. "He deserbes to be shot full ob holes, an' I am de boy to do dat same, if only I gets de chance."

Jack Ness was closely questioned, and he described the spot where he had last seen the unwelcome midnight visitor.

"He had a bag of something over his shoulder," he declared.

"Most likely the stuff taken from the house," declared Dick.

The party crossed the garden patch and then took to the path which ran down toward the river.

Here all was intensely dark, although it had stopped raining, and the wind was trying its best to scatter the heavy clouds that obscured the stars.

"Not a thing to see," observed Randolph Rover. "We may as well go back."

"Let us scatter and make a search," came from Dick, and his idea was carried out. But though they tramped the locality for a good half hour the pursuit of Arnold Baxter proved useless.

"He is probably making good use of his time," was Tom's comment. "He knew we would be after him hot-footed, just as soon as we heard of his being here."

"I'm going to drive over to the railroad station," said Dick. "He may hang around and get aboard of the first morning train."

"Take me along with you," said Sam, and Dick agreed. They got Aleck to drive them and took the fastest team the stable afforded.

But at the depot all was dark and deserted, and if Arnold Baxter was anywhere near he took good care not to show himself, nor was anything seen of him in Oak Run later on.

"He has left the neighborhood by some other way," said Randolph Rover, and his surmise was correct.

When the boys reached home again they found their parent sitting up in an easy-chair, with his forehead still bandaged. The blows he had received were painful, but by no means serious, and when the doctor was called in he said the patient would speedily recover.

"But you had a narrow escape," said the doctor. "Had you been struck a little harder your skull might have been broken."

"Well, I don't think Arnold Baxter would have cared if he had broken my skull," answered Anderson Rover. "He is a thoroughly bad man."

It was broad daylight before a complete examination of the house was made, and then it was learned that Baxter had run away with some silver knives, forks, and spoons, some gold napkin rings, a silver and gold water pitcher, and half a dozen similar articles. From the desk he had taken a pocketbook containing three hundred dollars in cash, and from Anderson Rover's person his watch and chain, and a diamond stud. He had also tried to rob the unconscious man of his diamond ring, but as the ring would not come off had pried out the stone and taken that.

"He is at his old tricks again," said Dick. "Evidently his term in prison has done him no good."

"Guess it has made him worse," added Sam. "Oh, how I would like to lay my hands on him!" And Tom said the same.

The authorities were notified, including the sheriff of the county, and later still Anderson Rover hired a New York detective to take up the case. But it was of no avail. Arnold Baxter did not show himself, and not a trace of him was to be found anywhere.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he disguised himself as soon as he got away from here," remarked Tom. "He could easily put on a false mustache, and a wig would fit capitally over that almost bald pate of his."

"But where would he get the mustache and wig, Tom?" asked Dick.

"He may have bought them before he came here. I have heard that some robbers prepare themselves for all sorts of emergencies. Only last week I was reading about a fellow who went to a ball, and between the dances went out and robbed a gentleman on the street of his watch. When he was arrested, he tried to prove that he hadn't been outside of the ballroom all night, and it was by the merest accident that the authorities found out his story wasn't true."

"Tom is right; some criminals are very shrewd," said his father. "And I fancy Arnold Baxter is about as slick as any of them."

"Well, I hope we run across him some day," said Dick.

With so much to occupy their minds the days flew by swiftly, and almost before they knew it Monday was at hand, and the three boys set out to return once more to Putnam Hall.

CHAPTER V

ON THE WAY TO PUTNAM HALL

The idea of going back to dear old Putnam Hall, with all of its pleasant memories, filled Tom with good humor, and he was fairly bubbling over on the train which carried the boys to Ithaca, where they were to take a steamer up Cayuga Lake to Cedarville, the nearest village to the academy.

"Makes me feel as I did the first time we went to the Hall," he declared. "Don't you remember that trip, and the fun we had with Peleg Snuggers, the wagon man?" and then he burst out singing:

"Putnam Hall's the place for me!
Tra-la-lee! Tra-la-lee!
Putnam Hall's the place for me!
The best old school I know!"

"You'll have the conductor putting you off, the next thing you know," remarked Sam.

"Putting me off? Never!" cried Tom. "He knows that academy boys own privileges that other passengers do not possess. He can't cork me up. I defy him!"

"Wonder if we'll meet any of the other fellows," mused Dick.

He had hardly spoken when the train stopped at a junction, and two other lads got aboard and came down the aisle. One was tall and handsome, and the other stout and with a round, chubby face beaming with good humor.

"Larry Colby!" cried Dick, leaping up and grasping the tall boy's hand.
"I'm awfully glad to meet you. Returning to the Hall, of course?"

"Yes," was the answer from the Rover boys' old chum. "Isn't it odd that
I should be thinking of you just as we meet?" and he shook hands.

"Hullo, if it ton't peen dem Rofer brudders alretty," cried the round-faced lad, with a twinkle in his eyes. "I dink me you vos left der Hall for goot, yah!"

"Hans Mueller!" came from Sam. "Then you are going back, too? I thought you had scarlet fever?"

"Not much I ain't," said the German youth. "I vos eat too much of dem puckveat cakes alretty, und dot makes mine face preak owid, put I ain't got no scarlet fefers, nein! How you vos alretty annahow?" And he shook hands as Larry had done.

"I can hardly believe your story about being cast away on an island in the Pacific," said Larry.

"Your letter read like a fairy tale. If you tell the fellows they'll think you are drawing the long bow."

"Yes, Larry vos told me somedings apoud dot," broke in Hans. "You vos regular Robinson Roosters," he said.

"Great Scott! Robinson Roosters!" yelled Tom, bursting out into a fit of laughter. "Boys, we are discovered at last."

"Well, if you are, you needn't crow over it," came from Larry.

"Roosters and crowing! Oh, Larry, I didn't think you'd begin to pun so early," put in Sam.

"He just hatched it out," said Tom.

"I suppose you think that sounds chic," joined in Dick. And then there was a laugh in which all but Hans Mueller joined. The German youth looked blankly from one to another of his companions.

"Vos dot Robinson Rooster a choke?" he demanded. "Of it vos let me in by it kvick."

"Oh, you couldn't climb in on a gangway and a step-ladder combined," answered Tom.

"Put vos you Robinson Roosters or vos you not Robinson Roosters?"

"Oh, we were Robinson Roosters right enough," answered Tom, when he could control his laughter.

"Den vot you vos giggling apout, hey?"

"Nothing, only it was so funny to be a Robinson Rooster and live on a big island with nobody but lions, buffaloes, snakes, and 'cannonballs,'" added the fun-loving youth.

"Cannonballs?" queried Larry

"That's what Aleck Pop calls 'em, Larry. He said it was a wonder the 'cannonballs' hadn't eaten us up," and then came another laugh, during which Hans was as mute as ever.

"Vos dere lions, snakes, and buffaloes py dot island on?" went on the German youth.

"To be sure there were, Hans. And likewise elephants, panthers, cats, dogs, hippopotamuses, mice, elk, rats, and winged jibberjackers."

"Mine gracious, Tom! Und you vosn't eaten up alretty kvick!"

"None of the animals troubled us, but the three-horned jibberjacker. He came into our house one night, crawled upstairs, and began to swallow Sam alive."

"You ton't tole me!"

"Yes, I do tell you. He had Sam in his mouth, and had swallowed him as far as his waist, when Sam began to kick on the floor with his feet."

"I see, I see—" Hans' eyes were as big as saucers.

"That woke Dick and me up, and we ran and got Sam by the legs, and pulled for all we were worth."

"You ton't tole me, Tom! Und vot did dot vot-you-call-him do den?"

"He planked his ten feet on the floor, and—"

"His ten feet did you said, Tom?" interrupted Hans doubtfully.

"To be sure. Didn't you know that a real jibberjacker has ten feet?"

"Maype I did—I ton't oxactly remember about him."

"I am surprised at your ignorance of natural history, Hans. Yes, the real jibberjacker has ten feet, although a branch of the family, known as the jibbertwister, has only eight feet."

"Well, go on. He planked his ten feets by der floor town—"

"He held on and so did we, and it was a regular tug of war between us. Sam was swallowed as far as the waist, and couldn't do anything to help himself. You just ask Sam if that isn't so."

"When Tom tells the truth it's a fact every time, Hans," answered Sam, who felt as if he would choke from suppressed laughter.

"So the blamed old jibberjacker held on and held on," continued Tom. "Then we gave a tug and he gave a tug, and all of a sudden Sam came out. The shock was so great it threw Dick and me clear across the room, and through a doorway into the next room. But the poor jibberjacker fared still worse."

"How vos dot?"

"He flew up against the outside wall, and his weight was so great he went right through the side of the building, and landed on some rocks below. All of his ten legs were broken, and of course he couldn't get

away, so we went down, got a long cross-cut saw, and sawed off his head. Now, if you don't believe that story, you come to our house sometime and I'll show you the cross-cut saw."

Hans stared in breathless amazement. His solemn face was too much for the others, and a peal of laughter rang through the car. At this Hans grew suspicious, and at length a sickly grin overspread his features.

"I know you, Tom Rofer," he said. "Dot vos von of dem fish stories, ain't it alretty?"

"No, it's a jibberjacker story, Hans."

"It vos a jibjacker fish story den annahow. You can't fool me some more. I vos too schmart for dot alretty. Ven I go py der academy I git mine ear teeths cut, hey?"

"All right, Hans, if you have cut your ear-teeth we'll call it off," said Dick, and here the conversation took a more rational turn.

"So far as I know only a few of the fellows have left the Hall on account of the scarlet fever scare," said Larry. "And they were boys that nobody seemed to care much about."

"I was told that the fellows expected to elect an entirely new lot of officers," said Sam. "We have been away so much I've rather lost track of our military affairs."

"Captain Putnam said we would have to ballot for officers as soon as all the boys were back," said Larry. "Some of the old officers have graduated, you must remember."

"I've not forgotten that I was once second lieutenant of Company A," put in Dick. "Reckon I'll have to try my luck once more—if the boys want me to run."

"Well, I want you to run for one, Dick," said Larry. "Hans, you'll vote for Dick, won't you?"

"Yah, und I vonts him to vote for me, too," said the German youth.

"Why, Hans, do you want to be water-carrier this year?" asked Sam.

"*Nein*, I vonts to be high brivate py der rear rank alretty. Von of der fellows tole me dot would chust suit me."

"All right, Hans, we'll all elect you high private of the rear rank," answered Larry with a laugh.

CHAPTER VI

FUN ON THE BOAT

At the city of Ithaca the boys stopped long enough to get dinner, and were here joined by Fred Garrison and George Granbury, two more of their old school chums.

"Hurrah for the gathering of the clans!" cried George Granbury, with a beaming face. "This is like a touch of old times. How are all of you, anyway?"

"First rate, with the exception of Hans here," said Tom. "He's got the buckwheat measles."

"Yah, und Tom he's got der jipperjocker fefer," declared the German boy, bound to do his best to get square.

"Good for Hans!" cried Sam. "Tom, after this, you have got to take care, or Hansie will roast you."

"Oh, Hans is just all right," observed Tom, and when the German boy's face was turned away he took the latter's coffee and put into it about a teaspoonful of salt. "Tell you what, fellows, this coffee just touches the spot," he added loudly.

"Right you are," said Fred Garrison. "Never tasted better in my life."

So far Hans had not touched the coffee, but hearing the words he took up his cup and downed a deep draught. It may be added that he was a German who loved coffee a good deal, and frequently drank several cups at a meal.

For an instant the German youth said nothing. Then his face turned pale.

"Dat coffee was no goot!" he gasped.

"Why, Hans," cried several.

"See how pale he is getting," came from George Granbury. "Hans, are you going to die?

"Don't say the coffee is going to poison him," burst out Tom. "I was reading about poison getting into the coffee at this hotel last week. But, of course—"

"Did da got poison py der coffee in here?" demanded Hans.

"To be sure, put—"

"How vos dot poisoned coffee taste annahow?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"I think it was a little salty," came from Fred Garrison.

"Mine cracious me! Of dot's so I vos poisoned, sure. Run for der toctor kvick!"

"Here, eat some jam, Hans. That will counteract the effect of the poison," said Tom, and handed over a small dish with jam in it, over which he had just sprinkled the pepper with an exceedingly liberal hand.

Anxious to do anything that would stop him from being poisoned, the German boy clutched the dish and took a large spoonful of the jam. But as he gulped it, he gave a gasp, and the tears started down his cheeks.

"*Du meine zeit!*" he bawled. "I vos purnt up alife by mine mouth alretty! Dake it avay kvick!" And jumping up from the table he began to dance around madly.

"It's a serious case," said Tom. "If he's burning up we had better call out the fire department."

This remark made Hans grow suddenly suspicious. He caught up Tom's cup of coffee and tasted it.

"I know you, Tom Rofer," he said. "Dot vos more dricks of yours, ain't it?" He held the cup of coffee on high. "How you like dot, hey!" And splash! down came the coffee on Tom's head, and trickled down his back.

"Hi, you! let up!" roared Tom, and knocked the half-empty cup to one side. "Let up, I say, or I'll have the landlord put you out."

"I told you to take care, Tom," came from Sam, when the other boys had restored quietness. "When Hans gets his dander up he is dangerous."

"Dot is drue," came from Hans. "I vonts no more of them chokes alretty." And then, as the waiter came hurrying up, he forced Tom to order him another cup of coffee, and took good care to keep it out of the fun-loving youth's reach. Poor Tom sopped away the spilt coffee as best he could, but it must be admitted that for the balance of that day his backbone felt none too comfortable. Yet he bore no grudge towards Hans, for he knew that he had deserved the punishment meted out to him.

Down at the dock the boys found the *Golden Star*, a trim little side-wheeler, ready to take them up the lake. There were about half a hundred passengers, bound for various landings, and among them six Putnam Hall scholars, including our old-time acquaintances, Jack Powell, generally called Songbird Powell, because of his habit of composing poems and songs, and that aristocratic young gentleman who rejoiced in the name of William Philander Tubbs.

"The family is surely getting together," remarked Dick, after another handshaking had been indulged in. "Songbird, do you warble as much as ever?"

"You can wager a sweet potato he does," said George Granbury. "Nothing short of a cyclone will ever stop Songbird's warbling, eh, Songbird?"

For reply the youth addressed turned a pair of dreamy eyes on the speaker, and then said slowly:

"With hopeful hearts
And brightest faces,
To school we go
To fill our places.
We'll study hard,
And do our best—"

"If Songbird Powell
Will give us a rest!"

finished Tom. "Oh, Songbird, have mercy on us, and don't begin so early."

"You're a good one to preach, Tom," came from Larry. "Started to joke the moment we met him, didn't he, Hans?"

"Did I?" questioned Tom innocently. "I had forgotten." He turned to Tubbs. "And how is our friend Philliam Willander to-day?"

"William Philander, if you please, Rover," was the dignified reply. "I must insist on your getting my name correctly this term."

"All right, Tubby, old boy, it shall be just as you say. I wouldn't hurt your feelings for a big red apple."

"Then, please don't call me Tubby. You know my real name is William Philander Tubbs."

"Don't you want Esquire tacked to it, too?"

"That is hardly necessary as yet. But you may write it after my name, if you have occasion to send me any written communication," continued Tubbs, with greater dignity than ever.

"Phew! but Tubby is worse than he was before," whispered Sam to Dick.
"They must have been tuning him up at home."

"Tubbs is going to try for a captaincy this term," said Powell, who had not minded Tom's interruption of his versification in the least.

"Hurrah for Captain Tubbs!" cried Tom. "Captain, allow me to salute you," and he made a sweeping bow to the deck. Tom spoke so earnestly that Tubbs was pleased, and instantly forgot their little differences.

"I shall be pleased to become a captain," said the young gentleman. "I feel I can fill the position with credit to myself and dignity to the academy. There is military blood in my veins, for a second cousin on my mother's side was a lieutenant in the Civil War. Besides that, I have studied military movements at West Point, where I went to see the cadets drill."

"Do you know how to swab out a cannon?" asked Sam, with a wink at the others.

"I shouldn't—ah—care for such dirty work," replied William Philander
Tubbs with dignity.

"Or police a camp?"

"Surely you don't think I was ever a policeman?"

"Don't you remember what policing a camp is?" asked George Granbury.

"Upon my honor, I do not."

"It means to clean up the streets, burn up the rubbish, and all that."

"Thank you, but I do not—ah—care to become a street cleaner," returned
Tubbs, with great dignity.

"Sorry, but I'm afraid you are not cut out for a corporalship," came from Tom.

"I didn't say a corporalship, Tom, I said—"

"Excuse me, I meant a sergeantship."

"No, I said—"

"Make it a second lieutenantship, then, Tubby. Anything to be friends, you know."

"I said—"

"Oh, bother, if you want to be a major-general, go ahead. Nobody will stop you."

"Hurrah, Major-General Tubbs!" cried Sam. "That sounds well, doesn't it, fellows?"

"We'll have to present him with a tin-plated sword," came from one of the crowd.

"And a pair of yellow worsted epaulets," added another.

And then Songbird Powell began to sing softly:

"Rub a dub, dub!
Here comes General Tubb!
He'll make you bow to the ground!
You must stop ev'ry lark,
And toe the chalk mark,
As soon as he comes around."

"There you are, Tubby; think of Songbird composing a poem in your honor," cried Tom. "You ought to present him with a leather medal."

"I—I don't like such—er—such doggerel," cried William Philander Tubbs angrily. "I think—"

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Tom, in pretended astonishment. "And Songbird worked so hard over it, too! Thus doth genius receive its reward. Songbird, if I were you, I'd give up writing poems, and go turn railroad president, track-walker, or something like that."

"You boys are simply horrid, don't you know!" cried Tubbs, and, pushing his way through the crowd, he walked to the other end of the boat.

"Being away from school hasn't done Tubby any good," was Fred Garrison's remark. "He thinks he's the High Tum-Tum, and no mistake."

"Don't fret, he'll be taken down before the term is over," came from Larry Colby.

"That's true," added another pupil, who had been taken down himself two terms before. "And when he hits his level he'll be just as good as any of us."

The time on the steamer passed quickly enough, and after several stops along the lake, the Golden Star turned in at the Cedarville landing, and all of the Putnam Hall cadets went ashore.

CHAPTER VII

SOMETHING ABOUT THE MILITARY ACADEMY

As my old readers know, Cedarville was only a small country village, so the arrival and departure of the steamer was a matter of importance to the inhabitants.

The boys, consequently, found the little dock crowded with sightseers and more than one face looked familiar to them.

"There are the Rover boys," said one man, quite loudly. "Everybody knows 'em."

"We are growing notorious, it would seem," whispered Dick to Sam.

Back of the dock stood the big carryall attached to Putnam Hall, with the old Hall driver, Peleg Snuggers, on the box.

"Hullo, Peleg, old friend!" shouted Tom, waving his hand at the man. "How are we to-morrow, as the clown in the circus puts it?"

"I'm all right, Master Tom—an' will be so long as you let me alone," was the deliberate answer from the driver.

"He remembers you all right enough, Tom," came from George Granbury.

"Now, Peleg, don't throw cold water on my enthusiasm," said Tom reproachfully.

"I ain't throwin' water on nobody, Master Tom; I'm only giving fair warning that I want to be let alone," answered the driver doggedly. "No more monkey shines around me, remember that."

"All right, Peleg, I'll remember. And how is Mrs. Green, our worthy housekeeper?"

"First-rate."

"No whooping-cough?"

"No."

"Nor measles, or chicken-pox?"

"Not a bit of 'em."

"Or mumps? Tell me, now, she really hasn't got the mumps, has she?"

"See here, Master Tom, didn't I jest tell you—"

"No, you didn't tell me, and that's why I'm so anxious to know. If she's got the mumps, and the chilblains, and the ingrowing warts—"

"Oh, crickey! I knew it!" groaned Peleg Snuggers. "I says to myself as I was a-drivin' over, 'if thet Tom Rover comes back, I might as well throw up my job, for he won't give nobody a rest!' If you would only—"

"All right, Peleg, I see you are really and truly bound to go back on me. You hate me!" Tom drew his handkerchief from his pocket. "It is awful, after all I have tried to do for you in the past. I've got to— to— cry! Boo—hoo!" And the boy began to wipe his eyes.

"Look a-here, Master Tom, it ain't nothin' to cry about," said Peleg half suspiciously. "I only give you warnin'—"

"You are so—so hard-hearted, Peleg. Boohoo! I want to go back home!"
And Tom began to sob.

This was too much for the driver, and his face fell.

"Don't you mind me, Master Tom," he said softly. "I didn't mean nothin', indeed, I didn't. You're all right. I like you better'n any of 'em."

"Oh, dear!" burst out Larry Colby. "Just to hear that!"

"Peleg, have you gone back on us?" demanded George Granbury.

"He ought to have a ducking for that," put in another.

"Let's dump him into the lake!"

"Come on, a cold bath will do him good!"

"No! no! Oh, crickey!" groaned the driver of the carryall. "This is a mess! I—I didn't mean nuthin', gents, indeed, I didn't—"

"He's mean enough for anything, that's what he means," came from a voice in the rear. "Pile in, before he runs away, and leaves us to walk to the Hall!" And into the carryall the boys tumbled, one over another. Dick got a seat beside the driver, and away they went at a spanking gait, through Cedarville, and then along the winding road leading to the academy. Two or three of the cadets had brought tin horns with them, and they made the welkin ring as the turnout dashed on its way.

"A ginger-snap prize to the first fellow who spots the academy," cried Sam, as they made the last turn in the highway.

"I see the Hall!" shouted half a dozen voices in chorus. And in a few seconds they came out into full view of the broad brick and stone building, with its well-kept parade ground, and its trees and shrubbery. The parade ground came down to the edge of the wagon road, and off to the other side the land sloped gradually down to the lake, glistening like a sheet of gold in the rays of the setting sun.

The boys set up a loud shout and a wild blowing of horns, and in a moment a score of cadets came running forward to greet them, followed by Captain Victor Putnam, the master of the academy, and George Strong, his head assistant.

"I am glad to see you, young gentlemen," said Captain Putnam, as he shook one and another by the hand. "You look as if your vacation had done you good."

"It's done me a pile of good," said Sam. "But I don't know as I want another like it."

"You Rover boys have certainly had some remarkable experiences," continued the captain. "I congratulate you on escaping so many grave perils. Sometime you must give me all the particulars. But now it is time to prepare for supper. I dare say the trip on the lake has made you hungry."

"Dot is so," came from Hans Mueller. "I vos so hungry like four lions alretty."

"I have made some slight changes in your sleeping accommodations," went on Captain Putnam. "Mr. Strong will show you to your rooms." Then the boys marched into the academy, led by the head assistant.

The majority of the cadets had their dormitories on the second floor of the building. Each room held from four to eight students, and was both bright and clean. The rules of Putnam Hall were similar to those in force at West Point, and every pupil was expected to keep his clothing, his books, and his other possessions in perfect order. Each had a cot, a chair, and a clothes closet to himself, extra closets having been introduced in the rooms for that purpose, and each was allowed the use of his trunk in addition. Each cadet had to take his turn at keeping the room in order, although the dormitories were given a regular sweeping and cleaning once a week by the servants.

As before, the Rover boys were placed in one room, and into this came also Larry Colby, Fred Garrison, and George Granbury. The apartment was at an angle of the building, and next to it was another occupied by Songbird Powell, Tubbs, Hans, and three other cadets. Between the two rooms was a door, but this was closed, and was supposed to be kept locked.

"This makes one feel like home," said Sam, as he began to wash up for supper.

"Right you are," answered Larry Colby. "No matter where I go during a vacation, I am always glad to get back to Putnam Hall."

A little later came the evening parade of the cadets, who marched around the parade ground several times before entering the messroom, as the dining hall was termed. The late arrivals did not join in the parade, but they watched it with interest, and then hurried to their accustomed places at the long tables, where a plain, but substantial supper awaited them.

Only a little talking was allowed throughout the meal, but at its conclusion the cadets were given an hour off, in which time they could do very much as they pleased. In that hour some played games, others took walks, and not a few drifted over to the gymnasium, which stood at one corner of the grounds.

"I'm going over to the gym," said Dick to Larry Colby. "Want to go along?"

"Certainly," was the prompt answer. "I am going in for gymnastics this term, Dick."

"Want to win some of the prizes when we have our contests?"

"If I can."

"I don't see why you shouldn't, Larry. You seem to be in first-class shape physically."

"I am going to try hard, Dick."

They were soon in the building, and Larry slipped off to the dressing room to don his gymnasium suit.

While Dick was waiting for his friend to reappear he looked on at the efforts of the other cadets present. Some were on the rings and bars, others were using the parallel bars and horses, and still others were at the pulling and lifting machines. In one corner two of the boys were boxing, while another was hammering a punching bag as hard as he could.

The boy at the punching bag was a tall, big-boned youth, named Lew Flapp. He was a newcomer at Putnam Hall, but though he had been there but three weeks he acted as if half of the place already belonged to him. At the start, he had made a few friends, principally on account of the money he had to spend, but these were gradually deserting him.

Dick was interested in the work on the punching bag, and he walked closer to note what Lew Flapp was doing. Clap! clap! clap! went Flapp's fists on the bag, which bounced back and forth with great rapidity.

"Well, how do you like that?" asked Lew Flapp, as he paused in his exercise and stared at Dick.

"It's all right," answered Dick briefly.

"I'll bet there ain't another cadet here can do as well," went on Lew Flapp boastfully.

"Oh, that's saying a good deal," said Dick. "Some of the boys can hit the bag pretty well."

"Humph!" Lew Flapp stared at the eldest Rover harder than ever. "Perhaps you think you can do it," he sneered.

"I didn't say that."

"But your words implied it."

"Dick Rover can do every bit as well," said a cadet who overheard the talk.

"I want to see him do it."

"I didn't come here to punch the bag," said Dick as calmly as ever. "I just thought I'd take a look around."

"Humph! Afraid to try, eh?"

"Oh, no."

"I dare you to show what you can do," sneered Lew Flapp.

"Very well, I'll show you," came from Dick, and he began to take off his coat, collar, and tie.

CHAPTER VIII

A SCENE IN THE GYMNASIUM

Lew Flapp spoke in such a loud, overbearing voice that a crowd began to collect in the corner where the punching apparatus was located.

"What's up?" asked more than one cadet.

"Lew Flapp and Dick Rover are going to try to beat each other at punching the bag," was the report.

"Rover will have to do his best then. Flapp is a prime one at bag punching. It's about the only thing he can do real well."

"This isn't a fair contest," put in another student. "Flapp took lessons from a man who used to do bag-punching on the vaudeville stage."

"If that's so I wouldn't try to beat him, if I was Dick Rover."

Dick heard some of this talk but said nothing. He was soon ready for the trial, and stepping up to the punching bag he began to undo the top strap.

"That bag is all right," blustered Lew Flapp.

"Yes—for you," answered Dick. "But you must remember, I am not quite so tall. I must have it an inch lower."

"It seems to me you are mighty particular."

"I have a right to be. When you do your punching you can raise the bag as high as you please."

"That's the talk," came from several standing near.

By this time Larry was on the floor again, and he came up to learn what
Dick was doing.

"Dick, they tell me he is the best bag-puncher here," whispered Larry.

"I can't help it."

"He will crow over you if you don't do as well as he can do."

"Let him."

Dick began his punching exercise slowly, for he had not tried it for some time, and was afraid he was a little stiff. But, it may be added here, there was a punching bag in the barn at the Rovers' farm, so the youth knew exactly what he was doing.

"Oh, anybody can do that," remarked Lew Flapp presently. "That's as simple as A. B. C."

"Well, can you do this?" returned Dick, and branched off into something a trifle more difficult.

"To be sure I can."

"Then what about this?" and now Dick settled down to some real work.
Clap! clap! went the bag, this way and that.

"Yes, I can do that, too," answered the tall boy.

"I'd like to see you."

Lew Flapp was only too anxious to show his skill, and having adjusted the bag to suit him, he went at the work once again, doing just what Dick had done.

"Now do this!" he cried, and gave a performance of his most difficult exercise. It was certainly well executed and at the conclusion many of the cadets began to applaud.

"Dick Rover will have to hump himself to do that," remarked one.

"I don't believe he can touch it," said another.

With care Dick fixed the bag and went at the exercise. It was something he had not practiced for a considerable time, yet he did not miss a stroke, and he wound up with a speed fully equal to that exhibited by his opponent.

"Good for you, Dick!" cried Larry heartily.

"They'll have to call it a tie," suggested another cadet.

"I'm not done yet," said Dick. "Can you do this?" he asked of Lew Flapp, and then commenced an exercise he had learned some time before, from a boxing instructor. It was full of intricate movements, all executed so rapidly that the eye could scarcely follow them. The cadets looked on in wonder, Lew Flapp staring angrily at the performance.

"Wonderful!"

"I didn't know Dick Rover could do such punching!"

"Say, Flapp, you'll have to get up early in the morning to beat that."

"Oh, you shut your mouth!" retorted Lew Flapp angrily. "I can do ten times better, if I want to."

"Let us see you."

"I—I—I'm in no condition to go ahead just now. Remember, I was punching the bag for an hour before Rover got here."

"How can that be, when all of us just came from the mess hall?" questioned Larry.

"He's trying to sneak out of the trial," said a voice in the rear of the crowd.

"I'll sneak you!" roared Lew Flap, in a rage. "I want you all to know that I ain't afraid of Dick Rover, or anybody else."

"Do you want the trial to continue?" questioned Dick, in an even tone.

"Didn't I just say I was tired out? But I'll show you what I can do some time," blustered Lew Flapp.

"Oh; all right."

"You needn't think you're king-pin of the punching bag," went on the tall boy, who had lost control of his temper because of the exhibition.

"Thank you, Flapp, what I think and what I don't think isn't any of your business."

"Pooh! I've heard about you and your two brothers, Dick Rover. They tell all sorts of stories about you, but I don't believe the half of them."

"Come, come, what's the use of quarreling," put in Larry pleasantly.

"I'm sure I don't want to quarrel," answered Dick. "He challenged me to punch the bag against him, and I did so, that's all."

"You're dead stuck on yourself, Rover," went on Lew Flapp slangily. "You think you're the only toad in the puddle. But you ain't, let me tell you that. As soon as I heard about you, I made up my mind I wouldn't knuckle under to you."

"This isn't right!" cried Larry. "Dick is my friend, and let me say he never asks any cadet to knuckle under to him, unless the cadet did something that wasn't on the level."

"That's true! That's true!" came from half a dozen of the students. "Dick Rover is all right!"

"So you're all turning against me, eh?" burst out Lew Flapp fiercely, his face growing dark with rage. "I was warned of this before I came here."

"Who warned you?" asked Tom, who had just put in an appearance.

"A gentleman who used to teach here."

"What was his name?" questioned several.

"Mr. Jasper Grinder. He said he had left because the Rover boys tried to run everything."

"That old fraud!" cried Larry.

"He left because he was kicked out," came from another.

"And he is a criminal," put in Dick. "I can prove it, if he wants me to do it."

"Oh, you can talk all you please," growled Lew Flapp. "I know what I know, and don't you forget it. And what is more, Dick Rover, don't you expect me to knuckle under to you. If you try that game, you'll get what you least expect," and so speaking Lew Flapp forced his way out of the crowd and left the gymnasium.

"Well, of all the idiots I ever met!" came from Tom. "He believes in meeting trouble three-quarters of the way, doesn't he?"

"I think Jasper Grinder must have stuffed him full of stories about us," said Dick. "That's the way that rascally teacher expects to get square on Captain Putnam—by ruining the reputation of the school."

"Oh, it's mostly Lew Flapp's fault," put in a pupil who had been at the Hall for some time. "The very first day Flapp arrived he had a row with little Tommy Browne, and knocked Tommy down, and a few days after that he had a fight with Jack Raymond, and was pounding Jack good when Mr. Strong came up and made them run off in different directions. He's a good deal of the same kind of a bully that Dan Baxter was."

"If that's the case, he had better keep his distance," said Dick determinedly. "I don't want any quarrels, but I despise a bully thoroughly."

"So do I."

"I wonder if this Flipflap ever heard of Dan Baxter," put in Tom. "If he has he ought to profit by the example."

"Hullo, Tom's got a new name for Flapp," said one of the boys.

"Isn't his name Flipflap?" questioned Tom innocently. "Or is it Flapjack?"

"It will be Flopdown, if he ever gets into a fight with Dick," said Larry, and then followed a general laugh.

"I really don't want any more fights," said Dick, when he could be heard. "I came back to Putnam Hall to dig in and learn something. I've had enough adventures to last a lifetime. If the others will only leave me alone I'll leave them alone."

"But if they won't leave you alone, Dick?" asked George Granbury.

"Then they had better look out for themselves, that's all," was the reply of the eldest Rover.

CHAPTER IX

SETTLING DOWN TO STUDY

Dick meant what he said concerning coming back to Putnam Hall for the sake of learning something. He felt that he had lost too much time from school already to lose more, and he pitched in with a vigor that was indeed surprising.

"I don't see how you can do it," said Tom one day. "I can't, to save my life." Yet Tom was by no means a poor scholar, and if he did not stand at the head of his class he was not far from it. Sam was also doing his best, and all of this gratified Captain Putnam exceedingly.

"It shows they can work as well as play," was what the captain told himself, and he wrote Anderson Rover a long letter, in which he praised the boys for their efforts.

The boys fell into their places at the academy with a naturalness that was surprising when one considered the adventures that had but lately befallen them. Over and over again did they have to tell of their doings while on the Pacific, and as Crusoes, and some of the cadets never tired of listening to the stories. A few, including Lew Flapp, did not believe them true, but the majority did, and that was enough for the Rovers.

Dick was now advancing in years, and he knew that before long he would either have to go into business or to college, which he had not yet fully decided. To tell the truth, the thought of separating from his brothers was exceedingly distasteful to him.

"If I went to college I'd like you fellows to be with me," he said one day to Tom and Sam. "There would be no fun in going alone."

"That's true," answered Tom. "But if you wanted us to go together you'd have to wait for Sam and me to catch up to you."

"Well, I might spend a year or so in traveling while I waited, or Sam and you might hurry up a little," answered the eldest Rover.

During those days but little out of the ordinary happened. Dick took especial care to avoid Lew Flapp, and the tall youth did not attempt to bother him. It was soon learned that Flapp was more of a braggart than anything else, and then even some of the smaller boys grew less afraid of him.

As already told, it had been decided by Captain Putnam to have the cadets elect a new set of officers for the term, and these officers were to be chosen in a somewhat different manner than heretofore.

"In the past," said the captain, when addressing the students on the subject, "you have been permitted to elect whoever you pleased to any office, from major down. This has occasionally resulted in someone being chosen who, while he might be a good scholar and a good fellow generally, was not exactly fitted to a military position. On that account I have made a change. Next Wednesday and Thursday I shall hold a general examination in military matters only, and the twenty pupils standing highest shall be the ones eligible for the positions of major, captain, and first and second lieutenants. On these twenty names you shall vote as heretofore. As we now have three companies here we shall want a major, three captains, and six lieutenants, making a total of ten officers. After that each company shall choose its own corporals and sergeants. The company marching best on parade the following Saturday shall have the honor of carrying the flag until after the annual encampment, which this year will begin a month from to-day."

At the mention of the annual encampment the cadets set up a cheer. The outing was looked forward to with great interest.

"Where are we going this year?" asked George Granbury.

"It's a secret, I believe," answered Larry Colby. "But I am pretty certain that we are going further away than usual."

"I hope we go into the mountains."

"Or along some other lake, where the fishing is fine," put in Tom.

"Yes, that would suit me, too."

The announcement concerning the examination in military matters also caused much talk, and many of the cadets began at once to study military tactics harder than ever, while drills became a pleasure instead of a hardship.

"I'm going to win some kind of a place," said Larry earnestly. "Even a lieutenantship would be better than nothing."

"I am sure I am going to win," put in William Philander Tubbs. "I am perfect in every kind of a drill."

"Good for Buttertub, the perfect man!" sang out Tom. "Billy, you ought to have your picture done in oil, to hang alongside of Washington's, in the library."

"Don't you dare to call me Buttertub, or Billy either, you rude thing!" snorted Tubbs, and walked away in outraged dignity.

"Dot examinations vos dickle me alretty," said Hans. "Vot I don't know apoud dem military tictacs you don't know, ain't it. I vill pe by der top of der class so kvick as neffer vos, you pet yourself!" And he nodded his head as if he meant every word of it.

Dick Rover said but little on the subject, but he meant to win if he possibly could, and so did Tom. Sam felt he was as yet too young to become anything but a sergeant, so he did not enter the competition with much vigor.

Lew Flapp was not a particularly bright pupil, but there was one thing, outside of bag punching, that he could do well, and that was to drill. He

took to military tactics naturally, and knew nearly every rule that the book of instructions contained.

"It's going to be an easy matter to get into the chosen twenty," the tall boy told himself. "But after that, will the cadets elect me to one of those positions?" He wanted to be major of the battalion, but doubted if he could muster up sufficient friends to elect him.

The examination in military matters came off on the afternoon of the following Wednesday and on Thursday morning. Captain Putnam was very thorough in the work, and made the pupils do certain things over and over again, and write the answers to long lists of questions.

"It has given me great pleasure to conduct this examination," he said, on the day following. "It shows that the average in military knowledge is much higher than it was last term. The following are the pupils who have passed, given in the order of merit." And then he read the list of names. Lew Flapp came first, Dick Rover next, Larry Colby third, George Granbury fourth, and the others, including Tom and Fred Garrison, followed. Neither William Philander Tubbs nor Hans Mueller were mentioned.

"I dink me dere vos a mistake py dot," said the German boy. "Or else I vos know so much der captain didn't vont nobody to know apout it," and this raised a laugh.

"It's an outrage!" declared Tubbs. "An outrage! I shall request my parents to withdraw me from the institution." And he wrote a letter home that very night. But his parents refused to grant his request. Probably they knew of his shortcomings, and thought a few terms at Putnam Hall would do him good.

Lew Flapp was much pleased over the fact that he headed the list of those who had passed, and nobody could blame him for this. But he immediately made himself more obnoxious than ever by going around among the cadets and declaring that he was the only one to be elected to the office of major.

"It's mine by right," he said. "It wouldn't be fair to elect anybody else."

"But Dick Rover and Larry Colby stand almost as high," said one of the cadets. "Captain Putnam said your average was 96 per cent., while Rover's average was 95 per cent., and Larry Colby's was 94 per cent. A difference of one or two per cent. out of a possible hundred isn't much."

"I don't care," retorted Lew Flapp, "I ought to be elected major, and that is all there is to it."

When Dick was approached he had but little to say.

"I didn't expect to stand so high," he declared. "I don't know that I care to be made major. If I get to be a captain or a first lieutenant I shall be well content. You know I was a second lieutenant once."

"My percentage is more than I expected," said Larry. "I really didn't think I was so well up in military matters. Now, if the boys want me for an officer I'll take whatever they give me."

"And that is what I say," added George Granbury.

"Ditto, myself," put in Tom. "Even a second lieutenantship will not be declined by yours truly."

After this there was a good deal of canvassing and "log rolling" as it is called. Lew Flapp spent much money in secret, treating boys when at the village and elsewhere. By this means he gathered quite a band of followers around him.

"He is going to win, by hook or by crook," observed Songbird Powell. "He acts just like some of those politicians who don't care what they do so long as they win."

"I am not going to spend a cent on the boys," declared Dick. "I don't believe in buying votes."

There was a strict rule at Putnam Hall that no cadet should touch liquor of any kind excepting when ordered by the doctor. This rule had

been broken in the past by Dan Baxter and a few others, but the majority of the cadets respected the rule and kept it.

But Lew Flapp had always been allowed to drink when at home and now he frequently drank on the sly when down to Cedarville. On these excursions he was generally joined by a weak-minded boy named Hurdy, who was usually willing to do whatever Flapp desired done.

One day, just before the election for officers was to come off, Lew Flapp called Ben Hurdy to him.

"I am going down to Cedarville this evening," he said. "I want you to go along and invite Jackson and Pender and Rockley."

"Going to have a good time?" asked Ben Hurdy.

"Yes and you can tell the others so, and tell them if they know some others who want a good time, and can keep their mouths shut about it, to bring them along. But mind, Hurdy, we want no blabbers."

"All right, Flapp, I'll get the right fellows," answered Ben Hurdy, and ran away to fulfill his questionable errand.

CHAPTER X

AN ADVENTURE IN CEDARVILLE

On the same evening that Lew Flapp and his particular cronies went down to Cedarville to have a good time in a very questionable way, Dick Rover and Songbird Powell also visited the village, one to buy some handkerchiefs, and the other to invest in a book he had ordered from the local bookseller and newsdealer.

"I heard that Lew Flapp was going to Cedarville," said Powell, while on the way. "Do you know, Dick, I don't like that fellow at all."

"Neither do I, Songbird."

"It will make me sick if he is elected major of the battalion."

"Nevertheless, the cadets have a right to elect whom they please."

"I know that as well as you do. But I can't stand Flapp's domineering ways. And he is bound to grow worse if he is put in authority."

"As to that, I shall not stand being bullied," came from Dick, with flashing eyes. "I'll let him go just so far, and if he goes any further he'll have to beware."

Both boys were excellent walkers and it was not long before Cedarville was reached. Dick soon had the handkerchiefs wanted, and then Powell led the way to the bookstore, to obtain a volume of humorous verses he had ordered the week previous.

"I don't see why you buy verses, since you can make them up so readily," said Dick with a smile.

"Oh, I like to see what the other fellows are doing," answered his friend.

"I saw some more of your cadets in town to-night," said the bookseller, while wrapping up the book.

"Yes, I believe half a dozen or more came down," returned Powell.

"Having a special celebration to-night?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Why do you ask?" put in Dick, who knew the bookseller well.

"Oh, I only thought some of the boys were flying their kite pretty high, that's all," and the man closed one eye suggestively.

"Where did you meet the fellows?"

"Well—er—I'd rather not say, Rover. You see, I don't want to make trouble for anybody."

"Are they in town yet?"

"I presume they are. But don't say I mentioned it, please," pleaded the bookseller.

No more was said, and having paid for the book Powell walked out, with
Dick behind him.

"If those fellows are drinking it's a jolly shame," declared Dick, when they were out of hearing. "What do you think about it, Songbird?"

"Exactly as you do, Dick."

"Shall we hunt them up?"

"What good will it do? Lew Flapp won't listen to what you say, and I'm sure I don't want to play the spy and report him."

"But what if he is leading some innocent students astray? He has had half a dozen young chaps dangling at his heels lately."

"I know that." There was a pause. "We might look into some of the places as we pass them."

Very slowly they walked up and down the main street of Cedarville, a thing easy to do, since the stores extended only a distance of two blocks. Then they passed to a side street, upon which two new places had recently been built.

One of the new places was a butcher shop, and this was dark and deserted. Next to it was a new resort known as Mike Sherry's Palace, and this was well lit up and evidently in full blast.

"If Flapp is drinking he is evidently in this place," remarked Dick. "But I don't see anything of him," he added, after peering through the swinging doors.

"They tell me this Sherry has a room upstairs, also for drinking purposes," returned Powell. "Maybe Flapp and his friends are up there. They wouldn't want to be seen in public, you must remember."

"That is true. But how do they get upstairs—through the saloon?"

"There may be a back way. Let us look."

They walked around to the rear of the building and here found a door leading into a back hall. But the door was locked.

"This is the way up, I feel sure," said Dick. "Somebody has locked the door as a safeguard."

"Then, I'm afraid, we'll have to give it up."

"Not yet, Songbird." Dick had been looking over toward the rear of the butcher shop. "See, the painters are at work here and have left one of their ladders. Wonder if we can't move it over and put it up under one of those windows?"

The matter was talked over for a minute, and then the two boys took hold of the long ladder and did as Dick desired.

"This may be a wild goose chase," was Powell's comment. "And if it is, and Mike Sherry discovers us, he'll want us to explain. Maybe he'll take us for burglars."

"You can keep shady if you want to, Songbird. I'm going up," and so speaking Dick began to mount the ladder.

The window under which the ladder had been placed was open from the top only, and a half curtain over the lower portion hid what was beyond from view. So, in order to look over the curtain, Dick had to climb to the very top of the ladder and then brace his feet on the window sill.

He could now hear voices quite plainly, and presently heard Lew Flapp speak.

"I'm on the right track," he called softly to Powell. "They are in the room next to this one, but the door between is wide open."

"Shall I come up?"

"Suit yourself. I'm going inside."

As good as his word, Dick slipped over the top of the lowered window sash, and an instant later stood in the room, which was but dimly lit. Then he tiptoed his way behind a door and peeped into the room beyond.

Seven cadets were present, including Lew Flapp, Ben Hurdy, and their particular cronies Jackson, Pender, and Rockley. The others were two young cadets named Joe Davis and Harry Moss.

On the table in the center of the room stood a platter of chicken sandwiches and also several bottles containing beer and wine, and a box of cigars. Evidently all of the crowd had been eating and drinking, and now several were filling the apartment with tobacco smoke.

"Come, smoke up, Moss," cried Lew Flapp, shoving the box of cigars toward one of the younger cadets. "Don't be afraid. It won't kill you."

"Thank you, Flapp, but I—I guess I won't to-night," pleaded Harry Moss, whose face was strangely flushed.

"Why not?"

"I—I—don't feel well. The drinking has made me feel sick."

"Oh, nonsense! Here, take this cigar and smoke up. It will brace your nerves. And you, Davis, have another glass of something to drink," went on Lew Flapp, pouring out a glassful and handing it to the one addressed.

"Thank you, Flapp, but I don't want any more," answered Joe Davis. He looked as ill at ease as did Harry Moss.

"Don't you want to be sociable?" demanded the tall boy.

"It isn't that, Flapp. I—I guess I've had enough already."

"Oh, don't be a sissy, Davis. Here, I'll drink with you, and then I'll smoke a cigar with Moss. If you are going to be men you want to start right in. Eh, Rockley?"

"That's right, Lew," answered Rockley, as he lit a fresh cigar.

"What you need is another glass, Davis," came from Pender. "It will act as a bracer. Just try it and see."

"I—I don't want to get—get—" faltered Davis.

"Get what?"

"Intoxicated—really I don't—"

"Who said anything about that?" demanded Lew Flapp in apparent anger. "Don't be a fool. One more glass won't hurt you. Here, take it," and he almost forced the liquor to Joe Davis's lips.

But before he could accomplish his wicked design Dick Rover leaped quickly into the apartment and hurled the glass from the big boy's hand.

"For shame, Flapp!" he cried. "For shame!"

"And that's what I say, too," came from Powell, who was close behind Dick.

Every cadet in the room was astonished, and all leaped to their feet.

"What's up?" cried Rockley.

"They have been spying on us!" came from Jackson.

"Talk about meanness! This is the limit!" added Pender.

"I want you to leave Joe Davis and Harry Moss alone," went on Dick, as calmly as he could. "It's an outrage to get them to drink and smoke against their will."

"Are you two alone?" asked Lew Flapp, glancing nervously over the newcomers' shoulders.

"We are."

"What right had you to come here?"

"Well, we took the right."

"Then you enjoy playing the spy?"

"No, Flapp," said Dick boldly, "but I do enjoy doing Davis and Moss a favor."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I am going to stand by them, so you shall not get them to drink any more or smoke."

"Humph! What right have you to interfere?"

"Maybe he's going to squeal to the captain," put in Jackson.

"If he does that I'll punch his head for him!" roared Lew Flapp, who had been drinking just enough to make him ugly and unreasonable.

"I did not come here to squeal on anybody," answered Dick.

"I know you did—and I'm going to pound you well for it!" howled Lew Flapp, and on the instant he leaped forward and aimed a savage blow with his fist at Dick's head.

CHAPTER XI

A QUARREL AND ITS RESULT

Had the blow landed as intended Dick Rover would have received a bloody nose and might perhaps have lost one or two teeth.

But Dick was on the alert and he dodged to one side, so the blow landed on Songbird Powell's shoulder.

"See here, what do you mean by that, Flapp?" demanded Powell, who was no weakling.

"I meant to hit Rover," was the answer.

"Hands off, Flapp!" cried Dick. "I didn't come here to fight, but I can defend myself."

"We'll see!" roared the unreasonable tall boy, and made another rush at Dick. But in a twinkling he found himself flat on the floor, where he had been thrown with a suddenness that took away his breath.

"Hi! that ain't fair," put in Rockley. "You let Lew alone."

"I will, when he leaves me alone," retorted Dick. He turned to Harry Moss and Joe Davis. "Do you want to stay here any longer?"

"No," answered both of the small cadets promptly.

"I didn't wish to come at all, but Ben Hurdy urged it," continued Harry Moss.

"And Pender said it would do no harm," added Joe Davis. "He said we were going to have nothing but sandwiches, root beer, and soda."

"Look here, Davis, you keep your mouth shut!" cried Pender. "You knew exactly what to expect. You know Mike Sherry don't run a temperance hotel," he continued, with a sneer.

At these words Joe Davis grew pale.

"Yes, I know it—now, and if I ever get out of it, I shan't come again."

"Oh, you're too good to live!" broke in Jackson. "You ought to be laid away in a glass case for safe keeping."

"Davis is all right, and he has more brains than you, Jackson," came from Dick. "If you want to make a fool of yourself by drinking and smoking, I shan't stop you. But you shan't drag Joe and Harry into it against their will."

"That's the way to talk, Dick," said Powell. "Let us clear out, and take the youngsters with us."

By this time Lew Flap had recovered from the flooring received and now he approached Dick once more.

"Do you want me to hammer you good, Rover?" he panted.

"As I said before, Flapp, I didn't come here to fight, but I can defend myself. I propose to leave quietly, and take Harry and Joe with me."

"Supposing I won't let you leave?"

"I don't think you'll stop me."

"Come, Flapp, don't make a fool of yourself," put in Powell. "We didn't come here to quarrel, but to urge all of the crowd to quit drinking. You know it's against the Hall rules and regulations."

"And you intend to blab on us?"

"Not at all. I'm not that kind. And Dick Rover isn't either."

"I know how to fix 'em," came from Pender, with a cunning look in his eye.

"How?" asked Flapp and Rockley, in concert.

"Our word is as good as anybody's. If they say they found us at Mike Sherry's we can say that we found them there, too. For all we know they were drinking below before they came up."

"That's it!" interrupted Lew Flapp, thinking he saw a way of implicating Dick and Powell. "Mike Sherry never lets anybody in his saloon without they drink something."

"It's as plain as day," came from Rockley.

"They had all the liquor they wanted before they came up, and now they want to stop our sport."

"Your story might be believed were it not for one thing," said Dick, trying to keep calm. "Come on, Harry, come, Joe." And he whispered something into their ears.

"Oh, all right," said Harry Moss, and he retreated from the room, speedily followed by Joe Davis.

"Hi! come back here, you young scamps!" roared Lew Flapp. And then he made for the doorway leading to the next room.

"Not so fast, Flapp!" said Dick, and blocked the opening with his own form, while Powell stood directly behind.

"Say, fellows, Moss and Davis are getting out of the window!" cried Flapp, in astonishment.

"That's the way Rover and Powell must have gotten in," came from Pender.

"Exactly," answered Dick, "and that proves we didn't have to stop below for liquor," he added triumphantly.

"Look here, I don't mean to let those fellows go yet," blustered Lew Flapp. "Let me get at them."

"Not to-night, Flapp."

Scarcely had Dick spoken when the tall boy flung himself forward. The pair grappled, and a moment later both went down, with Dick on top.

"Hit him, Dick, don't let him get the best of you!" cried Powell, and an instant later found himself tackled by Pender and Jackson. For the moment Ben Hurdy, who had remained silent during the most of the talk, did nothing, but then he ran forward, and watching his chance, kicked Dick in the side of the head with his foot.

The quarrel was now on in earnest, and in the midst of the melee a burly waiter came rushing from below, demanding to know what was the matter.

"A pair of spies!" shouted Pender. "Help us to give them a sound thrashing, Pat."

"Sure, Oi will that!" was the answer, and the waiter joined in the attack on Dick and Powell.

It was with a mighty effort that Powell managed to throw off his assailants. Then he leaped for the window, reached the ladder, and fairly slid to the ground.

"Let up on Dick Rover!" he called, when safe. "If you don't, I'll rouse the constable and have somebody locked up."

"Confound him!" muttered Rockley. "We had better dust out. If he calls a constable the jig will be up."

With a parting kick at Dick he rushed down the back stairs to the resort, and unlocked the door. Taking care that Powell should not see him, he darted into the gathering darkness.

Ben Hurdy followed Rockley, and a moment later Pender and Jackson did the same. Then Flapp came staggering down the stairs, holding his nose, from which the blood was flowing freely.

"Let's get back to the Hall as quickly as we can," he said to the others. "And if we are examined, we can deny everything."

"All right," said Pender. "But what did you do to Rover?"

"Somebody kicked him and he's about half unconscious. I left him to the tender mercies of Pat the waiter." And then Lew Flapp and his cronies hurried away on the road leading to Putnam Hall.

Dick might have defended himself, but he was cruelly kicked several times, and partly lost consciousness, as already told. In a dim, uncertain manner he felt himself raised up and carried below, and then put on the grass of the yard behind Mike Sherry's resort.

When he was able to move he sat up and then arose to his feet slowly. At that moment Songbird Powell discovered him. Powell had been up the ladder a second time, to find the window closed and locked.

"Dick!" he exclaimed. "Are you badly hurt?"

"I—I don't know," was the slow reply. "How are you?"

"I'm all right?"

"Where are Flapp and the rest?"

"They ran away."

"And Harry and Joe?"

"They are waiting for us, down at the turn in the road."

Dick put his hand to his head, to find a big lump directly back of the ear. His ear was cut, and there was a scratch on his chin.

"They didn't fight fair," he explained, when he felt a little stronger. "They kicked me when I was down."

Aided by Powell he made his way to a pump and there bathed his head and procured a drink of water.

While both boys were recovering from the adventure all the lights in Mike Sherry's resort were put out and every door and window was locked.

"He wants to steer clear of trouble," said Powell.

"I put the blame on Lew Flapp," answered Dick. "To my mind he is about as mean as any boy around here."

"Of course we can't report him, Dick."

"No, I'm no tale-bearer, Songbird. But he ought to be punished."

"He'll make a fine major, if he's elected," went on Powell, as he and Dick started for the road leading to the academy.

"He shall never be elected, if I can help it."

"I am with you on that."

They found Harry Moss and Joe Davis walking slowly toward Putnam Hall. Joe seemed to feel all right now that he was out in the fresh evening air, but Harry complained of a strange sickness at the stomach.

"It was horrid of Lew Flapp to make us drink," said the young cadet. "I told him I didn't want anything stronger than soda. But he and Pender made me take it."

"I think the walk will do you good, Harry," answered Dick kindly. "Here, take my arm, and Songbird can take your other arm."

When the Hall was reached they found that Lew Flapp and his cronies had already gone to bed. Dick took Harry and Joe to their dormitory and then rejoined Powell.

"Going to keep mum?" asked the latter.

"For the present," answered the eldest Rover. "But after this let us keep a sharp eye on Flapp, Pender & Company."

And so it was agreed.

CHAPTER XII

THE ELECTION FOR OFFICERS

On the following morning all of the cadets but Harry Moss appeared in the messroom.

"Joe Davis says Harry is quite sick," said Powell to Dick.

"That's too bad. Have they sent for a doctor?"

"I don't know."

When Lew Flapp heard that Harry was sick he grew pale, and during the morning session could scarcely fix his mind on his studies.

"I hope the little fool don't blab on us," was his thought. "If he does there is no telling what the captain will do. He's altogether too strict for comfort in some things."

No doctor was sent for, so it was finally agreed that Harry Moss was not as ill as had been supposed. But the young cadet did not enter the schoolroom for all of that day.

The sickness had frightened Captain Putnam, who was not yet over the scarlet fever scare, and he questioned Harry thoroughly about what he had been doing, and about what he had been eating and drinking.

At first the young cadet did not dare to tell the truth, but finally he blurted out that he had taken a glass of liquor against his will and it had turned his stomach in a most painful manner.

"Where did you get the liquor?" demanded Captain Putnam sternly.

"I—I—oh, must I tell you, sir?"

"Yes, Harry."

"I—that is, Lew Flapp—Oh, sir, I don't want to be a tattle-tale."

"Did Lew Flapp give you the liquor? Answer me at once."

"Yes, sir, he and another cadet named Pender. But, sir, I don't want to hurt them. I—I—" and here Harry burst into tears.

"Where was this?"

"Down in Cedarville, sir. But, I—I—I shan't say any more, Captain Putnam," and after that Harry remained silent. As it was plain to see that he was suffering, Captain Putnam did not push the matter. But he called Lew Flapp and Pender into his private office and interviewed the unworthy pair for fully half an hour.

"To do such a thing is outrageous," said the captain. "If I hear of it again I shall dismiss you from the Hall at once."

On the following morning one of the assistant teachers made a brief announcement that filled the entire school with curiosity.

"On next Monday you are to have an election of officers for the term," said he. "As you know, twenty cadets were selected as worthy of being elected. The list has since been cut down to eighteen. Lew Flapp and Augustus Pender will not run."

At this announcement Dick and Powell looked at each other significantly. All of the other cadets looked around to find Flapp and Pender, but the pair were absent, nor did they put in an appearance at all until the next school session.

"The captain found it out in some way," said Dick to Powell.

"Shouldn't wonder if Harry Moss let the cat out of the bag," was the answer.

"It's queer about Flapp and Pender," declared Tom to his older brother. "Do you know why they were dropped?"

"Yes, Tom, but I don't want you to say anything about it."

"There's a report around that they were found cutting loose in the village," put in Sam.

"Well, as I said before, I don't want to speak about it," went on Dick.

A few of the boys dared to question Flapp and Pender, but got no satisfaction.

"If I want to drop out I reckon I can do it," growled Flapp, and that was as much as either he or his crony would say.

With Flapp out of the race there was considerable curiosity to know who would be elected for the term. Each set of cadets had their favorite candidates and the spirit of rivalry ran high. But most of the candidates were good-natured about it, and especially Dick and Tom Rover and George Granbury, Fred Garrison, and Larry Colby.

It had been decided that the cadets should first elect the major, then the three captains, and then the six lieutenants, all to be selected according to the highest number of votes received.

The voting began on Monday immediately after breakfast. Captain Putnam had slips passed around and on these each cadet wrote down his choice for major.

"I will read the result," said the captain, a few minutes after the poll was declared closed. And he read as follows:

"Whole number of votes cast—96.

"Lawrence Colby has 67.

"The next highest student has 19.

"Lawrence Colby is declared elected major of the battalion for the present term, including the annual encampment."

"Hurrah for Major Larry Colby!" cried Tom, and a rousing cheer followed, while Captain Putnam strode over and shook hands with the newly elected commanding officer.

"I must congratulate you, Major Colby," he said warmly. "I must say I am well satisfied with the choice of our students."

"Thank you, sir," answered Larry, and blushed in spite of himself.

"We will now proceed to the election of the three captains," went on Captain Putnam. "Remember, the three standing highest on the list will be declared elected respectively."

Again slips were passed around and again the students marked down the names of their favorites, three upon each slip.

Counting up the vote for captains took longer than that for major, but soon the captain had his statement ready and the cadets listened in silence as he proceeded to make his announcement:

"Whole number of votes cast, 288.

"Richard Rover has 82.

"Fred Garrison has 67.

"Mark Romer has 59.

"The next highest student has 28.

"Richard Rover is elected captain of Company A, Frederick Garrison captain of Company B, and Mark Romer captain of Company C, for this term and during the annual encampment."

"Hurrah for Dick Rover!"

"Hurrah for Fred Garrison and Mark Romer!"

And then the students cheered as wildly as ever, while Captain Putnam once more offered his congratulations.

"Captain Rover, my hand," said Larry, coming up.

"Thank you, Major Colby," answered Dick, and then both gave a grip that meant a good deal.

"We seem to be right in it," observed the newly elected major.

"That's true," answered Dick.

"We shall now proceed to the election of six lieutenants," went on Captain Putnam, and once more the slips went the rounds, and the boys did a lot of writing and speculating as each put down the six names required.

This vote was rather a long one, and Captain Putnam had two teachers help him in tabulating the result.

"This contest must make Flapp feel sick," whispered Powell to Dick, while the students were taking it easy on the parade ground.

"Well, he brought it on himself," was the brief reply.

"I'll wager he tries to square up with us, especially if he thinks we told on him."

A bugle sounded, calling the cadets together, and once more Captain Putnam read the result:

"Whole number of votes cast, 576.

"John Powell has 83.

"William Merrick has 76.

"Walter Durham has 71.

"Thomas Rover has 68.

"George Granbury has 51.

"Raymond Hollbrook has 43.

"The next highest cadet has 38.

"John Powell is declared first lieutenant of Company A, William Merrick first lieutenant of Company B, Walter Durham first lieutenant of Company C, Thomas Rover second lieutenant of Company A, George Granbury second lieutenant of Company B, and Raymond Hollbrook

second lieutenant of Company C, for this term and during the annual encampment."

As this announcement was made there was a breathless silence. Then came a rousing cheer and the various successful ones were congratulated by the captain and their friends.

"Well, Songbird, it seems you are to be my first lieutenant," said Dick as he shook hands with Powell. "That suits me first-rate."

"And I am to be second lieutenant," said Tom, coming up. "With Sam in the company as private this begins to look like a family affair."

"Oh, I'm going to make you fellows toe the mark now," laughed Dick. "No more skylarking, if you please, Lieutenant Rover."

"All right, Captain Rover," replied Tom, with a stiff salute that was side-splitting.

Taking it all the way through the election was declared to be a popular success. Of course some of the defeated candidates were bitterly disappointed, but they did their best to hide their true feelings. William Philander Tubbs had declined to vote and Lew Flapp and Gus Pender had kept entirely out of sight while the voting was going on. The two cronies took themselves to the gymnasium and there declared their hatred of Dick Rover.

"He is responsible for this," muttered Flapp, clenching his fists and grating his teeth. "But for him I might at this minute be major of the battalion, or one of the captains. Oh, but won't I square up some day!"

"What will you do?" questioned Pender. "Remember, I'm just as down on him as you are."

"I don't know yet, Gus. But I'll do something."

"All right; when you are ready to act, let me know, and I'll help you all I can," answered Gus Pender.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIGHT AT THE BOATHOUSE

Inside of a week the newly-elected officers felt perfectly at home in their various positions. Captain Putnam's idea of allowing only such cadets to be candidates as could fill the positions properly had borne good fruit, and the battalion was now in better condition than ever before.

Contrary to general expectations, Larry Colby, as major, proved a strict disciplinarian when on parade. In the playground he was as "chummy" as ever, but this was cast aside when he buckled on his sword and took command.

"This is as it should be," was Captain Putnam's comment. "And it is the same throughout life: play is play and business is business."

As a captain Dick was equally successful and Tom also made a good second lieutenant. Company A was speedily voted superior to the others, when drilling and when on the march, and consequently became the flag bearer for the term.

"This is splendid!" said Dick, when the announcement was made. And then he went at Company A, to make the cadets drill and march better than ever.

But though the students gave considerable time to military matters, they were not permitted to neglect their regular studies, and to their honor be it said that the three Rover boys pitched in with a will.

"If I can't be an officer I'm going to be a high grade student anyway," said Sam, and kept his word. Books suited him better than did military

glories, and soon he was at the top of his class in almost every branch of learning.

Many of the cadets were anxious to know where the annual encampment would be held, but for the time being Captain Putnam declined to discuss the subject.

"We will talk about that as soon as lessons are done for the term," said he.

"I don't believe we'll go to Brierroot Grove again," said Powell to Dick. "A farmer has built a house up there and is clearing off the land as fast as he can."

"I wish we could go to some place at a distance," returned Dick. "All of us know this territory pretty well. I like to visit new localities."

"So do I."

During those days the Rover boys received a letter from their father which proved unusually interesting. Anderson Rover wrote, in part, as follows:

"You will be surprised to learn, at this late day, that something had been heard about Arnold Baxter. A man who knows him fairly well met him a few nights ago in Owego. The news was telegraphed to me at once, and the local police were informed, but since that time nothing more has been seen or heard of the rascal. The man said he was well dressed and had been stopping at a leading hotel. Evidently he is using what was stolen."

"In Owego!" cried Sam. "Why, that city isn't over fifty miles from here."

"This is his old stamping ground," put in Tom. "For all we know he may now be hanging around Ithaca or Cedarville."

"I don't believe he'll come here," said Dick. "He is too well known."

"Oh, if only we could lay hands on him, Dick!"

"Wish we could, Tom. But Arnold Baxter knows enough to keep out of our clutches."

"Wonder if he knows what became of Dan?"

"Like as not our story was in all the newspapers, and they mentioned Dan too."

"If that is so, it's more than likely he thinks we are responsible for Dan being left behind on the island."

"I'm not going to bother my head about Arnold Baxter," put in Sam. "If he shows himself I'll have him arrested, that's all."

One day after another slipped by and all of the boys continued to study with a will. Once they received long letters from Dora Stanhope and Nellie and Grace Laning, and sent long letters in return.

"Wish the girls were back here," said Dick. But this could not be, as they had decided to remain in California for a while longer, and the boys had to content themselves by sending the girls keepsakes by which to be remembered.

On the Friday afternoon preceding the final week of the term Tom and Sam walked down to the lake, intending to go out in a boat for a short row.

As they drew close to the boathouse they heard loud talking and then a cry of pain.

"Please don't," came in the voice of a young cadet. "Please, please don't, Flapp!"

"But I just will, you little imp!" came in Lew Flapp's harsh voice. "I'll teach you to play the sneak!"

"But I—I didn't mean to do anything, really I didn't," answered the other. "But I felt so sick, and I—"

"Oh, I know you, Moss. For two pins I'd break your head for you!" And then came the sounds of several blows in quick succession.

"It's Flapp!" cried Sam. "He is beating somebody most shamefully."

"It's little Harry Moss," returned Tom, leaping to the front. "The big bully! Why can't he take a fellow of his own size?"

He rushed around the corner of the boathouse and there beheld a scene that aroused his warmest indignation. Harry Moss was crowded into a corner and over him stood Lew Flapp, beating him with a heavy boat chain.

Flapp had just raised the chain for another blow when Tom ran in and caught his arm.

"Stop!" he cried. "You let Harry Moss alone!"

Startled at the interruption Lew Flapp turned. When he saw both Tom and
Sam his face fell.

"What do you want here?" he asked sulkily.

"I want you to leave Harry Moss alone," answered Tom.

"Oh, Rover, please make him stop," pleaded Harry. "He's trying to kill me!"

"No, I ain't," retorted Flapp. "I'm only giving him a whipping that he deserves."

"It's an outrage to strike anybody with that chain," said Sam.

"You needn't put your oar in, Sam Rover!"

"But he just will, and so will I," said Tom. "Give me that chain," and he tried to pull it from Lew Flapp's hand.

"Let go!" screamed Lew Flapp, and began a struggle to keep the chain in his possession. He struck at Tom, hitting him in the shoulder. Then Tom got mad, doubled up his fist, and Lew Flapp received a blow in the left eye that made him see stars.

"Oh!" he howled and dropped the chain. "Tom Rover, I'll get even for that, mind that!"

"What do you mean by attacking Harry Moss in such a disgraceful fashion?"

"Because he's a sneak, and you know it."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"Didn't he go and blab on me to Captain Putnam?"

"About what?"

Lew Flapp paused and eyed Tom and Sam curiously.

"I reckon you know well enough," he remarked slowly.

"But I don't know anything. Do you, Sam?"

"Not a thing. So far as I know Harry is all right."

"Is he?" sneered Flapp. "Well, I don't think so."

"What was the trouble about, Harry?" asked Tom, turning to the small boy.

"Don't you say a word!" shouted Lew Flapp, in alarm. "If Tom and Sam
Rover don't know already they needn't know at all, so there."

"Evidently you don't want Harry to talk," said Sam suggestively.

"He's a sneak, I tell you."

"And you are a big, long-legged bully," retorted Tom. "For two pins I'd give you a good drubbing."

"Humph! Do you think you can lick me?" blustered Flapp, who felt certain he could best Tom at fisticuffs.

"I don't think so—I know it," said Tom coolly.

"Don't you fight him, Tom," said Sam, in alarm. "He only wants to get you into trouble. He'd like nothing better than to see you lose your position as lieutenant."

"He's afraid," sneered Lew Flapp. "All of you Rover boys are mere bags of wind."

"I don't think you found Dick a bag of wind, Flapp."

"Yes, I did. Now you clear out and let Moss and me settle this affair between us."

But this was not to be, for Harry Moss was already at the doorway of the boathouse and now he retreated to a safe distance.

"If you hit Tom Rover, or Sam, I'll call Mr. Strong?" cried the little cadet.

"Don't you do it," said Tom. "I am not afraid of Flapp."

"But he's so big, Tom."

"I don't care for that."

Tom had scarcely spoken when Lew Flapp, watching his opportunity, leaped forward and planted a blow on his chin that sent him staggering back into Sam's arms.

"Now come on, if you dare!" he cried.

"All right!" came from Tom, as he recovered. And like a flash he flew at Lew Flapp, before Sam could do a thing to stop him. Blow after blow was taken and given by each of the cadets, and Tom was hit in the chest, on the shoulder, and in the left cheek. In return Flapp got one in the right eye that almost closed up that optic and then came a blow on the nose that made the blood spurt in all directions.

"Good for you, Tom!" cried Sam, dancing around, forgetful of what he had just said about his brother getting into trouble. "That's the time you did it. Now give him another!"

Again the two boys went at it and once more Tom was struck in the shoulder. Then Lew Flapp aimed for Tom's face, but the latter ducked and, recovering, hit the big boy a heavy blow in the chin that made his teeth rattle and sent him staggering over the side of an upturned boat and flat on his back.

"Hurrah!" cried Sam. "That was almost a knockout, Tom. Now give him to understand—"

Sam broke off short, as a warning cry from Harry Moss reached his ears.

All eyes turned toward the doorway of the boathouse and a second later George Strong, the head teacher, stepped into view.

CHAPTER XIV

GETTING READY FOR THE ENCAMPMENT

For fully ten seconds after the head teacher appeared nobody spoke. Lew Flapp arose slowly to his feet, and bringing out his handkerchief applied it to his bleeding nose.

"What does this mean?" demanded George Strong sternly.

"He—he pitched into me," faltered Flapp.

"That is hardly true," returned Tom hotly.

"Both of you are well aware that it is against the rules of this school to fight," went on the teacher.

"I know that, Mr. Strong," answered Tom. "But Flapp struck me first."

"It isn't so!" cried the big boy. "I wasn't doing anything, when Rover came along and started to quarrel."

"My brother Sam and Harry Moss can prove that Flapp struck me first."

"That is true," said Harry Moss, while Sam nodded.

"What was the quarrel about?"

"I caught him here, beating Harry with this boat chain. I told him to stop and then he pitched into me."

"Is this true, Moss?"

"Ye—yes, sir, but—I—I—didn't want to say anything about it, sir."

"Do you mean to say that Flapp attacked you with that chain?"

Harry Moss was silent.

"Answer me."

"He did. But, Mr. Strong, I don't want to make any complaint. He and some of the others think I'm a—a sneak already," and now Harry could hardly keep back his tears.

"I don't know why he attacked Harry," put in Tom. "But I couldn't stand it, and I took the chain away from him and told him to stop. Then he struck me, and we pitched into each other—and I guess he got the worst of it," added Tom, a bit triumphantly.

"Hum! Flapp, you may go and bathe your nose, which I see is bleeding, and then come to Captain Putnam's office. The others can come to the office with me."

George Strong led the way, and Tom, Sam, and Harry Moss followed. The teacher took along the boat chain and made Harry show where he had been struck.

Captain Putnam looked very grave when the affair was explained to him.
He questioned Harry in private and learned that the attack was made by Flapp because of what the young cadet had told about drinking and smoking.

"Rover, it was wrong to fight," said the captain to Tom. "But under the circumstances I am inclined to be lenient with you. You can retire, and this evening during off time I want you to write one hundred times, the proverb beginning, 'Blessed are the peace-makers.'"

"Yes, sir," said Tom humbly. He was glad to escape thus easily, for he knew that the captain was very strict concerning fighting.

A little later the others were sent off, leaving Lew Flapp alone with Captain Putnam.

"Flapp," said the owner of the school, with a hardness that made the big boy's heart sink into his shoes. "I hardly know what to say to you. Your former conduct was mean enough, and this appears to be on a level with it. With such a heavy boat chain you might have injured Moss very seriously. Do you want me to give you another chance or not?"

"Wh—what do you mean, sir?" asked Flapp, much frightened.

"Do you want to remain at Putnam Hall, or shall I send you home in disgrace?"

"I—I don't want to go home," said the big boy. His father was a rough man and he knew that if his parent heard of this trouble he would make him pay dearly for it.

"I expect my pupils to be young gentlemen," went on Captain Putnam. "This is an academy for the better class of boys only. Bad boys do not come here, but are sent to the reformatory. If I give you another chance will you promise to do better in the future?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well then, I will give you one more chance. I believe you are somewhat behind in your arithmetic. During the next four days you will remain in during all off time and apply yourself to such examples as your teacher gives you."

"Yes, sir."

"Now you can go, and remember, I want to hear of no further fighting, and no further molesting of Harry Moss."

"I'll remember, sir," answered Lew Flapp meekly, and then left the office and ran up to his dormitory, to bathe his nose and put witch-hazel on his hurts. Although outwardly humble he was in reality burning with rage.

"I'll have to be careful in the future," he told himself, with clenched fists. "But I'll get square—oh, I'll get square!"

"Hullo, hurt yourself?" asked Pender, as he came in.

"Yes, I fell over a boat down at the boathouse," answered the big boy.

"Is that so? I heard something of a fight, and came up to see about it."

"Oh, I had a row with Harry Moss and Tom Rover, but it didn't amount to much, Gus. But, say, I just wish I could square up with Dick Rover, and Tom, too!"

"You said something like that before."

"I'm going to watch my chances."

"Perhaps something will turn up during the encampment."

"Yes, I was thinking of that. A fellow has more of a chance in camp than he does in school."

"It would be a fine thing to get Dick Rover into trouble and make him lose his position as captain," went on Gus Pender.

"Yes, and make Tom Rover lose his position as lieutenant, too," added Flapp.

The term at Putnam Hall was now drawing to a close and it was not long before the semi-annual examinations began. All of the Rovers worked hard over their papers, and with more or less success. Sam came out at the top of his class, while Tom stood third in his grade, and Dick third in a still higher class. The boys lost no time in sending the news home, and received word back that not only their father, but also Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha, were much pleased with the result.

"Now we'll feel as if we deserve an outing," said Tom, and Sam and Dick agreed with him.

It was on the following morning that Captain Putnam made an announcement that filled all of the cadets with interest.

"You are all anxious, I know, to learn where the annual encampment is to be held," said he, during general assembly. "I am pleased to be able to

announce that I have arranged to hold it at Pine Island, a fine bit of ground, located close to the south shore of Bass Lake. The lake is situated about thirty-five miles from here, and we will make a two-days' march to the spot, stopping on the road over night, in true soldier style, weather permitting."

"Hurrah!" burst out half a dozen cadets.

"Three cheers for Captain Putnam!" called out Tom, and they were given with a will.

"I am told that the lake is an excellent one for fishing and for bathing, and I have already engaged six boats which the cadets will be allowed to use from time to time."

Again there was a cheer and with it a loud clapping of hands.

"While in camp you may play such games as you please, during off time, and we will see if we cannot arrange for contests at swimming, rowing, and running, and to the winners suitable prizes shall be given."

"Hurrah for Captain Putnam!" came the cry once more, and again a cheer arose.

"When will we start, captain?"

"Wish we were going right now!"

"We shall start Monday morning," was the answer. "To-morrow we will get out our tents and camping outfits and see that all are in first-class order. It is perhaps needless to add that during this encampment the officers will be in authority during all but off hours, when myself and my assistants will take charge."

This ended the talk, and the students immediately broke up into little groups to discuss the good news.

"We ought to have just a boss good time while in camp," cried Sam. "Think of living in tents, and having nothing to do but fish, and swim, and make yourself comfortable."

"Sam must be getting lazy," returned Dick. "But I grant you I think it will be first-class myself."

About the only pupil who did not relish going into camp was William Philander Tubbs.

"It will be beastly to live out in the open, on the ground," said Tubbs. "Supposing it should rain? Why, we'll all get wet!"

"Never mind, that will make you grow, Tubby," said Sam.

"Sam Rover, how often must I tell you not to address me as—ah—Tubby.
My full name is—"

"Oh, I know that—William Longfellow Washington Hezekiah Philander Salamander Tubbs. But you can't expect me to say that every time, can you?" questioned Sam innocently.

"Mine cracious! vos dot his hull name?" burst in Hans Mueller. "It's apout as long as a freight drain, ain't it, alretty!"

"No, my name is—"

"Perhaps I forgot one or two syllables," interrupted Sam. "Very sorry, I'm sure."

"I said my name—"

"I know you said it, half a dozen times, Billy. But you see life is so very short, and time so precious—"

"I meant to say—"

"Sorry, Billy, but I can't wait to hear it all," cried Sam, and ran away.

"He is—er—extremely rude," murmured Tubbs.

"Put dot's a long name, ain't it?" said Hans, "I couldn't remember dot no more as I can remember der names of all der kings py England alretty."

"Oh, I am disgusted!" sighed William Philander, and started to walk away.

"Vot is you disgusted apout, Mr. Dubbs?"

"Because they won't call me by my proper name."

"Do da call you by your imbrober name?" asked Hans innocently.

"Eh?"

"I said, do da call you py your imbrober name?" repeated the German youth.

"Oh, don't talk to me," howled Tubbs, and walked away more disconcerted than ever.

"Dot fellow vas so sharp like a pox of bebber, ain't it?" sighed Hans to himself.

The preparations for the annual encampment went forward rapidly. All of the outfit was inspected with care and found to be in good order. Each cadet was provided with a blanket, and a knapsack full of extra underclothing and other necessary things. The captain had already engaged three big wagons to carry the tents, poles, and cooking utensils, including several camp stoves, and from another quarter cots were to be sent to the camp direct, so that the cadets would not be compelled to lie upon the ground.

"Now, I guess everything is ready," said Dick; late Saturday evening.

Sunday was a day of rest for the most part. In the morning the majority of the students marched to church under the directions of the captain and Mr. Strong, and part of the afternoon was spent in writing letters to the folks at home. "Lights out," sounded half an hour earlier than usual, so that the cadets might get a good sleep before starting out on the two days' march.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE MARCH TO CAMP

Rat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat!

The cadets got their first taste of the annual encampment early in the morning, when, instead of hearing the familiar bell, they were awakened by the rolling of the drum.

"Time to get up, everybody!" cried Sam, flinging the covers from him. "It won't do to be late this morning."

"That is true, Private Rover," came solemnly from Dick. "I will fine any soldier of my command who is behind time."

"Thank you, Captain Rover, I'll remember that," came from one of the other cadets. "And how is Lieutenant Rover this morning"?

"Fine as silk," came from Tom, who was already splashing in the cold water of his washbowl. "I'll bet a big red apple against a turnip that I'm down first," and he began to don his uniform with remarkable rapidity.

All of the students were soon below, and then the various companies marched into the messroom for their last breakfast at the Hall for some time to come.

"I see the wagons have already left," said Sam.

"Yes, the drivers are to get the camp in readiness for to-night," answered his big brother.

Knowing that they had a long march before them, the majority of the cadets ate a hearty breakfast. Mrs. Green, the housekeeper, was sorry to have them leave, and had prepared an unusually fine repast.

"Mrs. Green is just all right," declared Tom. "I move we give her a vote of thanks." And this was later on done, much to the old lady's delight.

It was a perfect day. The sun shone brightly, and there was just enough breeze to keep the atmosphere fresh and exhilarating. Captain Putnam was to accompany the students on horseback, and the teachers had already gone off with the wagons.

"Battalion, attention!" shouted Major Larry Colby, when the cadets were assembled on the parade ground. And the order was immediately obeyed.

"Shoulder arms!" was the next order given, and up went every gun in unison. The movement was so pretty that the spectators who had gathered to see the boys march off clapped their hands in approval.

"Forward—march!" came next, and the drums and fifes struck up, and away went the cadets, company front, toward the road.

"By column of fours!" was the next command, and Captain Dick Rover turned to his company.

"By column of fours!" he repeated, and Company A broke up into four abreast and turned into the road leading off in the direction of Pine Island. The other companies also broke up, and in a minute more the cadets were really and truly on the march for the camp.

The drums and fifes sounded well on that bracing morning air, and quite a crowd of boys and not a few girls followed the students over the first of the hills back of Putnam Hall. But here the crowd dropped gradually away, until the young soldiers had the country road practically to themselves.

For a full mile the cadets were made to keep in step. Then came the order, "Route step!" and they moved forward as pleased them, keeping together, however, by companies. The route step is given that one may take the step that is most natural to him, be it longer or shorter than the regulation step.

Farms were rather scattered in that neighborhood, but occasionally they passed country homes, when all the folks would rush forth to learn what the drumming and fifing meant.

"They are the Putnam Hall cadets," said one farm woman. "How neat they look and how nicely they march!"

"Puts me in mind o' war times, Mirandy," said her husband. "Don't you remember how the boys marched away in them days"?

"Indeed I do, Ira," answered the woman. "But that was real, while this is only for fun."

"Well, I reckon some o' those lads would make putty good soldiers, were they put to it. They handle their guns like veterans."

The cadets marched until ten o'clock and then stopped for a brief rest near a fine hillside spring, where all procured a drink. Then they moved forward again until noon, when they reached a small village where dinner already awaited them.

"We have covered twelve miles," said Captain Putnam. "Eight more, and the day's march will be over."

The cadets were glad enough to eat their dinner and take it easy on the porch of the old country hotel at which they had stopped.

"Imagine us marching off to war," observed Sam. "How would you like it,
Tom"?

"Oh, I don't think I would complain," was the answer. "Anything for a bit of excitement."

The day's march was completed long before sundown, and the battalion came to a halt in an open field through which flowed a shaded brook.

The tents were at hand and the students lost no time in putting up the shelters.

Food was supplied for the occasion by a farmer living near, for it was not deemed advisable to unload the cook stoves and build the necessary fires.

The farmer gave the students permission to visit his apple orchard, and this the majority did, returning to the temporary camp with their pockets fairly bulging with apples.

The weather remained clear and warm, so the first night in the open proved very agreeable. A camp-fire was lit just for the look of things, and around this the cadets gathered, telling stories and singing songs until it was time to turn in.

Sleeping in a tent just suited the Rover boys and none of them awoke until sunrise. Soon the whole camp was astir, and each cadet took a good washing up at the brook. Breakfast was supplied by the farmer, and by nine o'clock the column was once again in motion on its way to Pine Island.

"Dot sleeping out in der air vos a funny dings," said Hans Mueller to Sam. "I vake up der middle of der night in und find a pig mouskeeter mine toe on alretty!"

"Be thankful that it wasn't something worse, Hans," said Sam. "What would you do if you woke up and saw a big black bear standing beside your cot"?

"I dink I cofer mine head kvick, Sammy."

"But the bear might chew the cover up."

"Den I vos rund for mine life und holler like sixty!"

"Well, you want to keep your eyes open for bears," added Sam, thinking he scented fun ahead.

"How vos I going to keep mine eyes oben of I go to sleep, tell me dot"?

"You'll have to figure that out yourself, Hansy, old boy;" and here the talk had to come to an end.

By the middle of the afternoon they came in sight of Bass Lake, a beautiful sheet of water about two miles and a half long by nearly half a mile wide. Close to the south shore lay Pine Island, so called because it was covered in spots with tall pine trees. Between the main shore and Pine Island were two smaller islands, and there were low wooden bridges from one to the other, connecting the big island with the mainland.

The wagons had already gone over the bridges to the spot selected for the camp, and now the battalion marched across, from island to island, under low arching trees and over ground covered with fallen leaves and moss.

"What a grand spot for a camp!"

It was Dick who uttered the words when the final halt was made. His words were true, and his fellow students agreed with him that Captain Putnam could not have made a better selection.

There was an open space nearly an acre in extent, covered with short grass and sloping slightly toward the lake. At the water's edge was a small wooden dock, where the boats were tied up, and next to this a sandy strip excellent for bathing purposes. Back of the open space was a fine grove of trees, to which the students could retire when the sun became too hot for them. More trees lined the north shore, some hanging out far over the water, making ideal spots for reading or fishing. There were beautiful walks through the woods, and in the center of the island was a rocky hill from the top of which one could obtain a view of the country for several miles around.

Captain Putnam insisted upon it that the camp be laid out in true military fashion, and two students who knew a little about civil engineering put down the necessary stakes. There was a street for each company, with a tent for the captain and his lieutenants at the head. Each tent was of the wall pattern and large enough to accommodate four soldiers. That the flooring of the tent might be kept dry around each a trench was dug, by which the water could run off when it rained. On the bottom pine boughs were strewn, giving a delicious smell to the interior.

"This smell of pine is very good for a cold in the head," said Major Larry to Dick. "My sister always uses a pillow filled with pine needles for that purpose."

The students worked hard that evening getting their tents ready for occupancy and as a consequence all were glad to retire when the proper time came. Captain Putnam had expected that there would be some skylarking, but he was mistaken. That was to come later—when the lads felt more rested.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIRST DAY ON PINE ISLAND

"Can anybody tell me where the—er—looking glass is"?

It was William Philander Tubbs who asked the question. He stood in the middle of one of the tents, gazing helplessly about him.

"Beastly way to live, really now it is," he continued. "How is a fellow to arrange his toilet without a glass"?

"Better run down to the lake and look into the water," suggested Sam, who occupied a cot in the tent.

"Look into the water? Beastly!" murmured Tubbs. "Really now, this isn't like home, is it"? he continued.

"It suits me well enough," went on Sam, leaping up and beginning to dress. "You'll get used to it before long."

"Never, my dear boy, never!"

As Tubbs spoke he began to put on his coat, but failed to get either of his hands further than the elbows of the sleeves.

"What's the matter with this coat"? he ejaculated. "Well, I declare!"

"What's up now"? asked another cadet.

"Somebody has gone and sewed up the sleeves."

There was a roar of laughter at this.

"Mustn't mind a little thing like that," said Sam, and he sat down on the edge of his cot to put on his shoes. "Great Scott, what's this"?

He had forced his foot into one shoe and now withdrew it covered with soft soap.

"Haw! haw!" roared Tubbs. "Rather fancy the laugh is on you now, Rover."

"That's a fact," muttered Sam, and began to clean out the shoe as quickly as he could.

Several other small jokes had been played, showing that the cadets were "tuning up," as Major Larry expressed it.

"I guess I'll have my hands full before the week is out," he said to Dick, in private. "Keeping order will be no fool of a job."

"Well, you must remember that you liked to have your fling too, when you were a private, major," answered the captain of Company A.

The cooking detail were already preparing breakfast and the aroma of hot coffee floated throughout the camp. Immediately after roll-call breakfast was served, of fruit, fish, eggs, bread, and coffee, and the cadets pitched in with a will.

"Gives one an appetite to live out in the open," said Lieutenant Tom.

"As if you didn't carry your appetite with you wherever you go," grinned Sam.

"Silence, Private Rover, or I'll fine you half a day's pay," flung back Tom with a similar grin.

"My, but we are some pumpkins," went on Sam, squaring his shoulders.
"Wonder how soon we'll get to be a general."

"Perhaps at the next general election," suggested George Granbury.

"Lieutenant Granbury is fined a peanut for punning," said Tom severely.
"Don't do it again and the fine will be remitted."

"That's a fine way to do," murmured George, and then Sam shied a tin plate at him.

As soon as the meal was over there was a drill lasting half an hour, and then the cadets were permitted to do as they pleased until noon. Some went boating, some fishing, while others took a swim, or simply "knocked around" as Sam expressed it.

"I shouldn't mind a swim," said Tom. "Who will go in with me"?

A dozen cadets were willing, including Dick, Larry, and Fred Garrison. As it was off time, Larry, even though major, did not feel it necessary to "stand on his dignity."

"I'm just going to be as I've always been," he told the others. "If I can't be that, I don't want to be major."

Several tents had been erected close to the water's edge, where the cadets might undress and don their bathing suits. Tom was the first ready, and with a run he plunged into the lake head-first.

"It's glorious!" he shouted, as he came up and shook the water from his head. "Worth a dollar a minute. Come on in!" And they came, one after another, without loss of more time. The water was slightly cool, but the students at Putnam Hall were required to take cold baths weekly, so they did not mind the temperature. Laughing and shouting gleefully they dove around in all directions, and then Tom suggested a race.

"Just the thing!" said another cadet. "Where shall we race to"?

"Over to yonder rock and back," answered Tom. "Line up, everybody. A stale biscuit to the winner and a sour cream puff for the last man. All ready"?

There was a pause.

"Start!" yelled Tom, and made a wild splash that sent the water flying in all directions.

"A race! A race!" shouted one of the students on the shore, and his cry soon brought a score or more of the others to the spot.

"I think Tom Rover will win that race."

"I'll bet on Major Larry."

"Fred Garrison is ahead. He's the best swimmer in the school."

"He can't swim as well as Dick Rover."

"I'll bet Jackson wins," came from Lew Flapp, who was in the crowd on the beach. Jackson, it will be remembered, was one of his particular cronies.

"Jackson can't swim against Dick Rover," came from Songbird Powell, who had hardly spoken to Flapp since the row at Mike Sherry's resort.

"I'll bet you a dollar he beats Rover," replied the tall boy, in a low tone.

"I don't bet, Flapp."

"You're afraid to bet," sneered the tall boy.

This statement angered Powell and he quickly dove into his pocket and pulled out the sum mentioned.

"This is the time you lose, Flapp," he said quietly.

Another student was made stakeholder and each boy passed over his money.

By this time the race was well underway. Tom was still in the lead, but Jackson was close behind him, with Larry Colby third and Dick fourth.

"Go it, Tom, you are sure to win!" shouted one of his friends.

"Don't know about that," Tom returned pantingly. "Guess I started too hard!" And soon he began to drop behind.

"Jackson is ahead!" was the next cry.

"Major Colby is a close second!"

"That is true, but Dick Rover is crawling up!"

So the cries went on until the big rock that was the turning point was gained.

Jackson touched the rock first, several seconds before either Larry or Dick came up. It certainly looked as if Lew Flapp's crony had a good chance of winning.

"Told you he would win," said Flapp to Powell.

"The race isn't over yet," answered Songbird briefly.

"Humph! Do you think Dick Rover can catch Jackson when he is five yards behind"?

"Not quite as much as that, Flapp, and he is gradually crawling up."

"He won't make it, I tell you."

"Perhaps he will."

"I'll bet you five to one that he won't," insisted the big boy.

"I won't bet any more."

"You're afraid," sneered Flapp.

Again Powell went down into his pocket and drew forth another dollar.

"There you are," he said to the stakeholder.

Lew Flapp had not expected this, but he quickly covered the one dollar with a five, feeling sure he was going to win.

"You'll never see your two dollars again, Powell," he said.

"Perhaps you'll never see your six again," answered Songbird, and moved away to watch the race from another point along the island shore.

Jackson was certainly swimming well, although the terrific strain was beginning to tell upon him.

"Go it, Jackson," roared Lew Flapp. "Go it, old Moneybags!"

"Moneybags" was a signal among many of the cadets, signifying that the speaker had bet money on the result. Betting at the academy was strictly prohibited, but wagers were often made on the sly.

Hearing this cry, Jackson renewed his struggles and for a few seconds held his lead.

But now Dick Rover was crawling up inch by inch. He had passed Tom, who was left hopelessly in the rear, and now he was pressing Larry.

"The major and the captain are tie!"

"See, Captain Rover is crawling ahead!"

"Swim, Jackson, swim!" yelled Lew Flapp frantically. "You must win!"
And Pender took up the call, and so did Rockley.

Again Jackson did his best. The finish of the race was now but twenty yards off.

"Go in and win, Dick," came from Larry Colby. "I'm about used up," and he let Dick go ahead.

Dick was almost as fresh as at the start and slowly but surely he kept gaining upon Jackson until the two were not over two yards apart.

"Hurrah, Captain Rover is crawling up!"

"Don't give up, Jackson, you can win out yet!" screamed Lew Flapp.

"Go it, Dick!" yelled Sam. "Go it, I say! The race is yours!"

Cheered by the last cry Dick increased his stroke and in a second more he was alongside of Jackson.

The latter made a side kick, intending to catch Dick in the stomach, but the eldest Rover was wise enough to keep out of his opponent's reach.

The kick made Jackson lose ground, and like a flash Dick passed him.

"Dick Rover is ahead!"

"See, Jackson is played out! He can hardly take another stroke!"

"Major Colby is crawling up! See, he is passing Jackson!"

"And here comes Tom Rover, too."

"Wake up, Tom!" cried Sam. "You can beat Jackson yet!"

At this cry Tom did wake up, and seeing Jackson floundering around put on a final spurt and passed him.

"Dick Rover has won the race!"

"And Major Colby is second, and Tom Rover third."

"Poor Jackson wasn't in it, after all!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE ENEMY PLOT MISCHIEF

The most disgusted cadet on Pine Island was Lew Flapp, and when Jackson walked out of the water and entered one of the bath-tents he followed his crony with a face full of bitterness.

"Why didn't you try to keep up and win out"? he asked bitterly, while Jackson was dressing.

"I did try. But Rover came up like a steam engine."

"You seemed to play out all in a minute."

"And that is just what I did do. The pace was too hot for me, and I just about collapsed. Those fellows are good swimmers, no two ways about that."

"Bah! I could have beaten them with ease."

"I'd like to see you do it."

"Do you know I lost six dollars on that race," went on Flapp, after a pause.

"Who won the money"?

"Songbird Powell."

"How did you come to put up such an odd figure, Lew"?

"I bet a dollar even first, and then, when I felt certain you would win, I gave him odds of five to one. I was a chump."

"Well, I did my best—honestly I did," returned Jackson, who hated to have his crony lose.

"I ought to make you pay me back."

"I'd do it if I had the money," said Jackson. He rarely had money in his pocket, spending everything as fast as received.

"Well, that is one more we owe that crowd," observed Flapp with increased bitterness.

When Jackson was dressed he and Flapp took themselves to another part of the camp, and there met Pender, Rockley, and Ben Hurdy.

"Let us take a walk," said Jackson. "I am sick of staying around where the others can stare at me."

"Come with me," put in Pender. "I have found something I want to show you."

"A gold mine, perhaps," said Flapp. "I need one just now. Betting on Jackson nearly cleaned me out."

"It's no gold mine, but it may prove useful to us," answered the other cadet.

The crowd started off, and Pender led the way through the woods and partly around the rocky hill in the center of the island.

"I ran into it quite by accident," he said. "You'd never suspect it was there unless you knew of it."

"Knew of what?" asked Rockley. "What sort of a mystery are you running us into now?"

"Just wait and see."

Pender stepped from the path they had been pursuing and pushed aside some overhanging bushes. Beyond was a small clearing, backed up by a high, rocky wall. In the wall was an opening, blocked up by a heavy

door secured by a rusty iron chain that was passed through a ring in the rocks.

"Well, this is certainly odd," exclaimed Flapp. "What kind of a place is it"?

"It's a den of some sort," said Hurdy. "Maybe some counterfeiters belong here."

"Bosh, you talk as if you were in a dime novel," came from Jackson. "More than likely some old hermit lived here. When some men get queer in the head they come to just such a spot as this to end their days. They hate the sight of other human beings."

"I reckon it is a hermit's den," said Pender. "But if so the hermit left it years ago, for everything inside is covered with dust and cobwebs and mildew."

Pender walked up to the stout wooden door, unfastened the iron chain, and threw the barrier back.

One after the other the boys entered the opening beyond. At first they could see but little, but gradually their eyes became accustomed to the gloom and they made out a rocky chamber about twelve feet wide and running back in irregular shape for a hundred feet or more. At some points the ceiling was so low they had to stoop, while elsewhere it was far above their reach. The flooring was fairly level, with rock in some places and hard dirt in others.

The opening was rudely furnished with a heavy table and a bench, and close to one wall was a box bed, still filled with pine boughs. On a big wooden hook hung a man's coat, so decayed that it began to fall apart when they touched it. The table contained several tin cups and plates, all rust eaten.

"This is certainly a curious find," said Flapp. "How did you happen to hit it, Gus?"

"I was exploring the cliff above when I happened to slip and fall into the bushes just in front of the door. I was shook up but not hurt, and when I got up I saw the door and wondered what it meant. Then I looked inside and after that went back to camp to tell you fellows about it."

"It will make a dandy place for secret meetings," suggested Rockley. "We can come here and do what we please."

"Just what I thought," said Pender. "We can smuggle no end of good things here from the nearest village and come whenever we have our off time."

"Perhaps we can do more than that," said Flapp, struck with a sudden idea.

"What"? asked the others.

"I'll tell you some other time. It's a great find," continued the tall boy.

In the meantime those left at the camp had surrounded Dick and were congratulating him on his victory.

"I knew you would win," said Powell, when the excitement was over. "I bet with Lew Flapp on the result. Garling was stakeholder."

"What did you win, Songbird"?

"Six dollars."

"Gracious! You went in pretty deep.'

"Flapp called me a coward when I told him I didn't want to bet, so I had to take him up," went on Songbird. "Had it been anybody else I might have given the money back. But I won't give it back to that bully."

"It's against the rules to bet, Songbird."

"But you are not going to tell on me, are you?"

"You know me better than to ask the question. Just the same, I am sorry you bet," said Dick.

"I'm going to treat the boys as soon as I get the chance," went on Powell. "Six dollars will buy a whole lot of ice cream and cake, not to mention soda and candy and peanuts." And then he began to hum to himself:

"Peanuts and candy and raspberry ice,
Chocolate cake, and all that's nice,
Ev'ry student can come if he will,
And ev'ry student can eat his fill!"

"I believe you'd sing at a funeral," said Dick, laughing.

"I wouldn't sing at my own funeral," answered Powell, and stalked off, humming as gayly as ever.

The remainder of the day passed quietly enough, although by the whispering in various tents it was easy to see that something unusual was in the air.

"Hazing to-night, as sure as guns," said Major Larry to one of the officers.

"Shall we arrest the hazers"? asked the officer, with a twinkle in his eye.

"You must obey orders," answered the youthful major, non-committally, since he had given no orders on the subject.

He could well remember his first year in camp, when he had been dragged from his cot at midnight, almost stripped, and thrown into a brook of icy spring water, and then made to run over a rough road in his bare feet for half a mile, "just to warm up," as the hazers told him. It was rough sport, not to be approved, but "boys will be boys," and it is practically impossible to stop hazing even in the highest of our institutions of learning.

It was poor Hans Mueller who was the first to suffer that night. In the midst of the darkness, for there was no moon, Hans found himself

suddenly aroused from his slumbers by being dragged out of his cot by the feet.

"Shtop!" he began, when a hand was thrust over his mouth. Then he was raised up by six cadets, shoved out of the back of the tent and carried away to the grove in the rear of the camp. The party had to pass two sentries, but the sentries were evidently posted, for they appeared to see nothing wrong.

Hans was not allowed to speak until he was out of hearing distance of the camp. Then he was dumped on the ground with a dull thud.

"Mine cracious! vot does dis mean annahow"? he demanded, as he struggled to his feet. "Does you vants to kill me alretty, drowing me aroundt like a log of vood, hey"?

There was no answer, and now he looked at the cadets, to discover that each wore a black mask, with a hood from which two black horns protruded.

"Who you vos alretty"? he spluttered, staring in open-mouthed amazement at the party. "You vos all look like der Oldt Boy, ain't it! I guess I go me back to der camp kvick!" and he started to run.

Hans did not get far, for a foot send him sprawling, and by the time he was again on his feet four masked cadets had him by the hands and arms, so that he could not get away. He started to yell when of a sudden somebody threw a handful of dry flour into his wide open mouth.

"Wuog!" he gasped. "Wuog! Do—you—wants—to choke me alretty!" And then he started to sneeze, as some of the flour entered his nose.

There was a moment of silence and then one of the masked figures advanced slowly.

"Hans Mueller, are you prepared to meet your doom"? was the question put, in a deep bass voice.

"Doom? Vot's dot?" asked the German boy, slightly frightened.

"Are you prepared to die?"

"Die? Not by a jugful I ain't. You let me go!"

"Are you prepared to become a full-fledged member of the Order of Black
Skulls."

"Not much, I ton't belong to noddings," gasped Hans.

"Then you must prepare to meet your fate. Away with him, fellows, to his doom!"

Before Hans could resist he was caught up once again. One of the cadets had brought with him a large blanket and into this the German youth was thrown. Then the others caught the blanket around the edges.

"Stop!" roared Hans, and tried to climb out of the blanket. But before he could manage it, the thing was given a toss and up he went, high into the air.

"Oh! Mine cracious!" he gasped and came down with a crash, to go up again an instant later. Then up and down went the boy, turning over and over, until he was all but dazed.

"Stop! Murder! Fire! Robbers!" he roared. "Let me owid, kvick! I vos turning outsides in alretty! Oh, stop, von't you, blease!"

"Will you join the Order of Black Skulls"? he was asked again.

"*Yah, yah!* Anydings, so long as you lets me town kvick!"

"And you will not breathe a word about what has taken place here"?

"I say me noddings, upon my honor, ain't it!"

"Then let him go, fellows," and a moment later Hans was lowered.

"Now you are one of us," said another student, and handed him a mask, skull-cap and pair of horns, the latter made of stuffed black cloth. "Do you promise to help us"?

"Anydings vot you vonts."

"Then come with us, and don't dare to open your mouth."

CHAPTER XVIII

HAZERS AT WORK

William Philander Tubbs was dreaming of a fashionable dance he had once enjoyed when he suddenly found himself bound and gagged and being carried he knew not where.

"This is awful!" he thought. "What in the world does it mean?"

Then he remembered that some of the cadets had spoken about hazing, and the cold perspiration came out on his forehead.

The gag in his mouth was made of nothing more than a knot in a clean towel, but it worried him a good deal and he was afraid he would be choked to death by it. But nothing of the sort happened, and soon the gag was removed.

"What does this mean?" he asked, as many cadets had done before him.

He received no answer, and tried to break away from his tormentors. But their hold on him could not be shaken, and before he was set down he found himself well out of sight and hearing of Camp Putnam, as the spot had been named.

"This is a beastly shame," he murmured. "Why do you dare to break into my night's rest in this fashion?"

He had heard of the mysterious society of Black Skulls before, but so far had never been hazed by the members. He looked curiously at the masked cadets, wondering if he could recognize any of them.

"Are you prepared to meet your doom?" he was asked.

"I am prepared to go back to my tent," he answered.

"Away with him!" was the cry.

"Where are you going to take me?" he asked anxiously.

There was no reply, but in a twinkling his hands were caught and bound tightly behind him, and a bag was thrust over his head and fastened around his throat. The bag was so thick that he could not see a thing before him.

"Let him take the cold water cure," said a voice, and he was forced to move forward.

"It's rather deep there," whispered a voice, just loud enough for him to hear.

"Not over his waist," whispered another voice.

"What! It's twice over his head," was the answer. "I tested the water this afternoon."

"Never mind, he's got to take the test anyway."

Now Tubbs was by no means a good swimmer, and the idea of being thrown into the water with his hands tied behind him and his head in a sack was frightful in the extreme.

"Le—let me go!" he whined. "Let me go, I say!"

"Forward with him!" was the heartless reply, and he was pushed on until he suddenly found himself in water up to his ankles.

"Stop! stop!" he cried, in a muffled voice. "Stop! I don't want to drown!"

"Will you obey your superiors?"

"Yes, yes—anything!"

"Will you join the Order of Black Skulls?"

"Anything, I told you, only don't let me drown!" cried the frightened William Philander.

"And will you promise to keep mum about what has happened here to-night?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Very well, you shall not be allowed to drown. But you must take the plunge."

"Oh, dear me! I can't—"

"Forward, and be lively about it. We will fish you out with a crab net."

"But I—I can't swim with my hands tied behind me!" chattered poor Tubbs.

"Yes, you can. Forward now! Ha, fellows, he will not go. Jab him with the pitchfork!"

At this a student stepped behind Tubbs and pricked his back with a pin.

The fashionable youth let out a yell of terror, and then, certain that he was about to take an awful plunge into some deep part of the lake, made a desperate leap forward.

A wild shriek of laughter rang out as Tubbs made the leap. He had jumped across a narrow brook not six inches deep and landed sprawling on the grass beyond.

"You are now initiated," said one of the masked cadets, when the laughter had somewhat died away. And at once Tubbs' hands were untied and the bag was taken from his head.

"Well, I never!" he murmured, as he gazed in amazement at the brook. "Thought it was the lake front sure!"

"As you are now one of us, Tubbs, you must wear these," said a cadet, and furnished the fashionable youth with a mask, cap, and pair of horns.

"We have now disposed of number two," said another cadet. "What of number three?"

"Number three must—"

At that moment a gun-shot rang out on the still night air.

"Hullo, something is wrong!" cried one of the hazers, in quick alarm.

"There goes the drum, fellows!" came in the unmistakable voice of Sam
Rover. "We've got to hustle back to camp or we'll be exposed!"

"Right you are," came from Songbird Powell. "Come, fellows, and mind you don't let anybody see the masks and other things."

And away they scooted, under the trees and then along a row of bushes running fairly close to the first line of tents. In the meantime the drum continued to roll and the whole camp was astir. Captain Putnam himself was out and was soon followed by Major Larry and Captain Fred Garrison. Dick Rover knew what was up and took his time about showing himself, since he did not wish any of the hazers to be captured.

"Call the roll!" said Major Larry, after making a round of the company streets. But he himself was in no particular hurry.

Almost out of breath with running, the hazers came into camp, accompanied by Hans and Tubbs. Masks, caps, and horns were pushed out of sight under cots, and then all sallied forth to join their various commands. Calling the roll was already in progress.

"All present or accounted for," came the declaration, five minutes later.

"All present, eh?" mused Captain Putnam. "That's queer. Who fired that gun?"

"Private Jackson."

"I will interview Jackson," said the master of the school, and he ordered Jackson to his private tent.

"What made you raise the alarm, Jackson?" he questioned sharply.

"I thought some of the cadets were out of camp, sir," was the answer.

"Did you see them go?"

"Not exactly, sir, but I thought I saw three or four of them sneaking along near the woods."

"Humph! You should be sure of what you are doing, Jackson. It is not commendable to arouse the whole camp at midnight for nothing."

"Well, I thought I was sure," insisted the crestfallen cadet. He knew for a certainty that some of the cadets had been out but saw no way to prove it.

"In the future be more careful while on guard duty," said Captain Putnam coldly; and there the subject was dropped.

"Who fired that shot?" asked Sam, on the morning following the hazing.

"Jackson," replied a cadet named Gilson, who had been one of the hazers.

"The sneak!" murmured the youngest Rover.

"That's what I say, Rover."

"Guess he did it to get square for losing that swimming race," put in another of the hazers.

"More than likely. We ought to square up with him for it."

"That's the talk."

"Vat's der madder mit tossing him a blanket up?" asked Hans earnestly.

"Think that's a good way to get square, eh, Hans?" laughed Sam.

"Dot's der vorst bunishments vot I know of," said the German boy with deep conviction. "Makes you feel like you vos going to preak abard alretty kvick!"

All of the boys knew that it would not do to try any more hazing for the next few nights. Even if the guards gave no alarm, Captain Putnam or one of the teachers might be on the watch to catch them.

On the following day it rained and the majority of the cadets were glad enough to remain under shelter. A few went bathing or fishing and the latter brought in quite a respectable mess of fish. Even in fishing the boys were rivals and a new tin cup was voted to the cadet bringing in the string that weighed the most.

The rain began about ten o'clock and by noon the water was coming down in torrents.

"This is beautiful," remarked Tom, as he looked at the puddle in the company's street.

"We ought to have dug another ditch to let that water run off," remarked Dick.

"Well, nobody wants to go out now and dig."

"That is true."

Instead of abating the rain became more violent as the afternoon advanced.

"This looks as if we were going to have some wind." remarked Major Larry with a doubtful shake of his head.

"I hope it doesn't blow too heavily," said Captain Putnam.

"Don't you think I had better caution the fellows to pin down their tents extra hard?"

"It would do no harm, Major Colby."

"Then I'll do it," said Larry, and issued the order without delay. Some of the cadets grumbled at being driven out into the wet, but the majority knew they were doing the work for their own good and went at it without a murmur.

At about sundown the wind fell and after supper it was as calm as it had been before the storm started.

"Told you there wasn't any use of getting wet pounding down stakes," growled Lew Flapp. He had done his work in a slip-shod fashion, staying out but a minute or two for that purpose.

It still rained, so building camp-fires was out of the question. This being so, the cadets turned in early, glad to seek the shelter of their cots and their warm blankets.

An hour went by, when of a sudden the rain increased once more. Then came a rush of wind that shook all of the tents violently.

"We are not out of it yet, it would seem," said Dick, as he sat up on his cot to listen to the flapping of the canvas in the company street.

He had hardly spoken when another gust of wind tore down on the camp. There was a ripping of cloth and a crashing of poles, and then a cry for help sounded from several places at once.

CHAPTER XIX

A STORM IN CAMP

"Say, fellows, are we all going up in a balloon!" cried Sam Rover, as he rolled off his cot in a great hurry.

One whole side of the tent was loose and the structure was in danger of tumbling down on the inmates' heads.

"Help!" came from the next tent. "I'm being smothered!"

"That's Lew Flapp!" said a cadet. "What's up now, Flapp?" he called out.

No answer came back, and now canvases could be heard ripping in all directions.

"Fasten down the pegs!" came the order. "Fasten them down, quick!"

The cadets were already at work, and Sam and his tent-mates set at their task with a will, realizing that every moment was precious. While one student held the peg upright the other would pound it down into the wet ground with a hammer or the back of a spade.

"The confounded pegs won't hold," cried out one cadet. "There she goes!" and the next instant the tent went flying skyward, to land on another tent some distance away.

It was still raining "cats, dogs, and hammer handles" as Tom Rover expressed it. All was dark, the only light being that given forth by the lantern which had not been blown out. Occasionally came a flash of lightning, followed by the distant rolling of thunder.

"This is one of the real comforts of camp life," said Songbird Powell sarcastically. "So much nicer than being under the roof of the Hall, you know!"

"Never mind, Songbird, you need a washing off at least once a year," replied a fellow sufferer.

A minute later came another yell from Lew Flapp. He and his tent-mates had tried in vain to hold down their canvas. Now it went up with a rush. One of the peg ropes caught around Flapp's leg and he was dragged over the wet ground, with his head splashing into every pool of water that he passed.

"Help me! I'll be killed!" roared the tall youth.

The tent was blowing along the company street and half a dozen cadets ran to the rescue, Tom with them. Some leaped on the canvas, while others held Flapp. Then the rope was cut with a knife.

"Wha—what a fearful wind!" groaned the tall boy, when he could speak.
"This is the worst storm I ever saw!"

"Oh, but I'm sorry I ever came to camp," groaned William Philander Tubbs. "I'm so wet the water is actually running out of my shoetops!"

"Ton't said a vord," came from Hans. "I dink me I half a rifer floating mine packpone town alretty! Of dis keeps on much longer der whole camp vos in der schwim, ain't it!"

"I reckon we're in the swim already," broke in Sam. "Some of us had better bring the rowboats up."

The high wind lasted for fully half an hour and during that time six of the tents were literally blown to ribbons, while many others suffered to a lesser extent. A quarter of the shelters laid flat in the mud, and nothing could be done with these until the wind went down.

"It's the worst blow I have seen since we have held our encampments," was Captain Putnam's comment, and he and the teachers went around with lanterns to aid the students as much as they could.

By three o'clock in the morning the storm was over and the stars began to peep forth from behind the clouds. As tired as they were the cadets had to set to work to put up the tents and arrange their cots as best they could. Camp-fires were lit in half a dozen places and the students huddled around these to dry themselves and get warm.

"I guess this is a touch of real army life," said Dick. "And I must say I don't like it overly much."

"We'll have to make the best of it, Dick," answered Tom, who had come over to see how his brother was getting along.

"How is Sam?"

"Oh, he's all right, although as wet as any of us."

"This storm reminds me of the one we experienced when in the jungles of
Africa," went on the eldest Rover. "Do you remember how it blew, Tom?"

"Indeed I do," was the answer, as Tom's mind went back to that thrilling experience, as related in "The Rover Boys in the Jungle."

On the following day the cadets were glad enough to remain in camp, cleaning out their tents and drying the things that had become wet. But the storm was a thing of the past and the sun shone as brightly as ever. Big fires were kept burning, and hot coffee could be had whenever wanted, so scarcely anybody suffered from the drenching received.

The storm had somewhat disarranged the plans made by Flapp, Rockley, and their particular cronies. But two days later Flapp, Rockley, and Pender got permission to go to the village of Oakville, two miles distant, one to buy some corn salve he said he wanted and the others to do a little trading.

The boys had collected nine dollars from various members of their crowd and this was to be spent for liquor, cigars, and for several packs of cards. All of these things were to be smuggled to the hermit's den Pender had discovered.

"We can get enough to last us during the encampment," said Flapp. "And then we can have a good time whenever we wish, and Captain Putnam will never suspect what is going on."

It did not take the cadets long to reach Oakville, a pretty place located among the hills. There were a dozen stores, a blacksmith shop, two churches, and perhaps fifty houses. Beyond were farms in a state of high cultivation, showing that the inhabitants of that section were thrifty people.

"This town is about as slow as Cedarville," observed Pender, as they walked up the single street. "How folks can idle their lives away in such a place is what gets me."

"They don't know anything of the joys of city life," returned Flapp. "Some of these people have never seen the inside of a real theater."

As might be expected, the unworthy cadets lost no time in entering one of the taverns located in Oakville, and here Flapp treated. Then, after cigars or cigarettes had been lit, they proceeded to buy the things desired for the den.

"Laying in quite a stock, ain't ye?" said the tavern keeper.

"Oh, we are getting this for the whole crowd," replied Pender carelessly. "But, say," he added suddenly.

"What is it?"

"We don't want you to say anything about our buying this stuff."

"All right, I'll be mum," answered the tavern keeper.

From the tavern they proceeded to the general store, where they purchased the packs of cards and a few other things.

While they were making their purchases two girls came in with a market basket between them. One was tall and thin and the other short and rather stout. Yet the girls looked very much alike and were noticeably pretty.

"Fine girls," whispered Flapp to Rockley, nudging his companion in the ribs.

"Yes," was the answer, and Rockley began to smile openly on the new arrivals. As the girls did not appear to notice this, he drew closer and tipped his cap.

"Fine day after the storm," he said smoothly. "Yes, very," said the taller of the girls, and turned away.

"I suppose you belong in Oakville," put in Lew Flapp, to the smaller girl.

"Yes," answered the girl, and turned away to join her companion.

"We are up to the camp on Pine Island," went on Rockley, following the girls up. "Have you ever been there?"

"Once," said the taller girl, and began to purchase some articles from the clerk behind the counter.

"You ought to come and take a look at our camp," continued Flapp. "It's a real interesting sight."

"All the girls are welcome," said Pender, feeling he must say something.

"We'd be willing to show you the way at any time," added Rockley, and placed his hand on the arm of one of the girls.

"Please let me be," said the girl, and walked away. A moment later she left the store, and her companion went with her.

"My, but they were shy!" laughed Pender. "Rockley, you didn't make any impression at all. Nor you either, Flapp."

"Humph! Wonder who they are?" murmured Lew Flapp.

"Let's ask the storekeeper and find out."

"Those girls are twins," said the proprietor of the establishment.

"Twins!" cried Rockley. "They didn't look it—not by their difference in sizes."

"But they did in looks," said Pender.

"What are their names?"

"The tall one is Alice Staton and the other is Helen Staton. Their father is the local constable, although he runs a big farm for a living."

"Do they come here often?"

"Pretty often. But they are very shy girls and don't hardly speak to anybody. They are both studying to be school-teachers."

In the meantime Helen Staton and her sister Alice were hurrying down the main street of Oakville with flushed cheeks.

"I don't think those cadets were very nice," said Helen.

"Certainly they were not very good-looking," replied Alice. "And I thought they smelt a little of liquor."

"The idea of their saying they would show us the way to the camp! I guess papa can drive us there if we want to go."

"I'd like to see it. But I shouldn't want to go with those boys," went on Alice.

"Perhaps papa can take us," said Helen. "But come, we promised mamma we'd hurry back as soon as we could."

To get home the two girls had to walk for a considerable distance along the road leading to Bass Lake.

On the way they passed the farm of one Isaac Klem, a man who took great pride in his poultry and his cattle. Klem had forty cows, and two bulls which were worth a good deal of money.

One of the bulls, a black, vicious looking fellow, was tied up in a small lot at the corner of the farm.

The girls were just walking past this lot when Helen happened to glance over her shoulder and set up a cry of alarm.

"Oh, Alice, Mr. Klem's black bull is loose!"

"Where, Helen?" queried her twin sister.

"There he is, at the fence. See, he is trying to get over!"

The fence she mentioned was of stones piled loosely, one on top of the other. The bull was striking at the stones with his front hoofs. Soon some came down, and then the animal leaped out into the roadway. Then he gave a snort and looked at the girls curiously.

Now as ill luck would have it, each of the twins wore a red shirt-waist. This color enraged the bull, and with a wild snort, he lowered his horns and rushed at the pair, as if to gore them through and through.

CHAPTER XX

THE ROVER BOYS AND THE BULL

About an hour after Lew Flapp and his cronies left camp, Dick Rover and his brothers received permission to do likewise.

"Let us go to the village," suggested Tom. "I want to buy some cough drops. My throat is raw from the wet weather."

"And I want to get some reading matter," added Sam. "A good story of some sort would just suit me."

"I wouldn't mind a magazine or two myself," came from Dick. "But I don't know if Oakville can supply them."

They were soon on the way, each in the best of spirits. Tom began to whistle and his brothers joined in.

"Feelin' putty good," queried a farmer, who chanced to be leaning over his garden gate as they passed.

"Why not?" retorted Tom. "It's better to whistle than to cry."

"Right you are, young man. When one of my hands is whistling I always know he is pitchin' in."

The way lay over a hill and around a bend where a number of apple trees lined the road. The apples were within easy reach, and soon each was chewing on the juicy fruit to his heart's content.

"Wonder where Flapp and his crowd went," came presently from Tom.

"If they went to Oakville they most likely visited the tavern," answered Dick.

"It's a shame!" declared Tom. "Drinking and smoking and playing cards will never do them any good."

Another bend in the road was passed and they came within sight of Isaac
Klem's farm.

"Hullo!" ejaculated Sam, pointing ahead. "What's the matter?"

"Those girls are running for all they are worth!" said Dick.

"A bull is after them!" came from Tom. "My stars! but he seems to mean business!"

Tom was right, Helen and Alice Staton were running along the highway at all the speed they could command. Behind them, less than fifty feet distant, was the enraged black bull, bent on doing all the mischief possible.

"Those girls will be hurt!" said Dick, running forward.

"Can't we do something?" asked Sam.

"We can try," said Tom. "Get a rock, or something," and he picked up a sharp stone which lay handy. Sam did likewise.

By this time the twins were almost upon the boys.

"Chase the bull away!" panted Helen, who was ready to drop from exhaustion.

"Yes! yes!" gasped Alice. "Please don't let him touch us!"

"Jump the fence!" said Dick. "Quick, I'll help you over!"

He caught each girl by the hand and turned toward the low stone fence. At the same time Tom and Sam let fly the two sharp stones. One took the bull in the nose and the other struck the creature in the eye.

With a snort the animal came to a halt and viewed the boys curiously. He had evidently not expected the attack, and the wound in the eye hurt

not a little. Tom and Sam lost no time in providing themselves with more stones.

By this time Dick was at the wall and in another moment he had assisted the girls over. Both had lost their hats and also dropped the market basket filled with things from the store.

"Oh, be careful," said Alice. "That bull will try to kill you."

"We'll look out for ourselves," answered Dick, and picked up a bit of fence rail lying near. "Did he chase you far?"

"From that lot yonder," answered Helen.

The bull had turned toward the fence, and watching his chance, Dick struck out with the bit of rail. His aim was good and the animal received a sharp blow directly across the nostrils. Then Sam and Tom let fly more stones, and the bull was hit in the mouth, the leg, and the side. He stood his ground for a moment and then began to retreat.

"Hurrah! we've got him on the run!" cried Tom. "Give it to him!" and he let go another stone, which hit the bull in the tail and made him throw up his rear hoofs in a most alarming fashion.

"You had better come over into the lot!" said one of the girls. "He may come back."

"Here comes Mr. Klem with a pitchfork," said the other.

A farmer was rushing down the road, with a pitchfork in one hand and a rope in the other. He ran up to the bull and slipped the rope over the animal's neck. Then he tied the creature to a tree.

"Pretty savage animal you've got," observed Tom as he came up.

"Is them gals hurt?" demanded the farmer.

"I don't think so. But they are pretty well out of breath and scared."

"Don't know how the pesky critter got loose," said Isaac Klem. "First thing I see he was after them gals lickety-split. I was out hayin', and I didn't wait, but picked up a pitchfork and a rope and run."

"The girls lost their hats," said Sam, who had also come up.

"Yes, they're in the road up yonder, along with a basket o' stuff they had."

"Let us get the things," said Sam, and he and Tom started after the hats and the basket. The things which had been in the basket were scattered in all directions, and the boys picked them up.

Dick remained with the girls, doing what he could to quiet them. They were so exhausted they could not stand and each sat on a rock panting for breath.

"It was simply dreadful!" declared Helen. "I thought every moment the bull would catch me and toss me up into the air."

"He didn't like the sight of your red shirt-waists," was Dick's comment.

"That must be it," put in Alice. "After this, I don't think I'll go near him when I have a red waist on."

"Perhaps the farmer will be more careful and keep him roped up."

When Tom and Sam came up with the hats and the basket Isaac Klem accompanied them.

"All right, Helen?" he asked. "And you too, Alice?"

"Yes, Mr. Klem," said the tall girl. "But it was a narrow escape. The bull would have gored us if it hadn't been for these young gentlemen."

The girls thanked Tom and Sam for what they had brought.

"Who be you young fellows?" asked Isaac Klem curiously.

"I am Dick Rover, and these are my brothers Tom and Sam. We belong to the cadets of Putnam Hall."

"The young sodgers up to Bass Lake?"

"Yes."

"I see. Well, it was gritty o' you to face my bull, and I give ye credit for it. My name's Isaac Klem, and thet's my farm over yonder. These gals is Helen and Alice Staton, and they live down the road a piece."

The boys tipped their caps and the girls smiled.

"We are very thankful to you," said Alice and Helen, almost in a breath.

"You are welcome to the little I did," returned Dick.

"It was fun to pelt the old bull with rocks," put in Tom. "I'll do as much for you any time," and this caused a laugh.

Isaac Klem went off to drive his bull home and the girls also prepared to depart.

"When you are coming back this way you can stop at our house if you wish," said Alice Staton. "It's the yellow one with honeysuckle growing over the porch."

"I remember it," said Sam. "Thank you," and the others also gave thanks for the invitation. A moment later the two parties separated.

"What a difference between those cadets and the ones we met at the store," said Helen to her twin sister when they were out of hearing.

"Yes, indeed," said Alice. "The Rovers are gentlemen, while those at the store were—were rude."

"Two nice girls," declared Tom. "How much alike their faces are!"

"Tom is smitten," cried Sam. "Going to forget all about Nellie Laning, Tom?" he went on quizzically.

"Oh, you needn't talk!" cried Tom, growing red in the face. "You were just as attentive as a dancing master yourself."

"Don't quarrel about it," put in Dick good naturedly. "You can be pleasant to them without forgetting all about Grace and Nellie Laning, I think."

"Or Dora Stanhope either," put in Sam slyly. "Shall we stop at the house on the way back?"

"Why not? They may offer us a piece of pie," said Tom.

"I don't know. We can walk by slowly. They may be on the lookout for us, you know."

Once again the boys set their faces toward Oakville, and soon reached the outskirts of the town.

They were passing some of the stores when Lew Flapp caught sight of them.

"Hullo!" cried the tall boy. "I declare! there are the three Rover brothers. What brought them to Oakville?"

"We had better not let them see us with this stuff," said Pender hurriedly. "We'll get into hot water if they do."

They lost no time in putting their purchases out of sight. Then they walked out on the street and stood leaning against the posts of a wooden awning.

"There is Flapp and his crowd now," said Tom, catching sight of the trio.

"We want nothing to do with them," said Dick. "They are not our kind at all."

"Hullo, Rovers!" cried Pender as they came up.

"Hullo, yourself," returned Tom coldly.

"What brought you to town?" asked Rockley.

"My feet."

"Thanks. I thought it might have been your ears. They're big enough."

At this sally both Flapp and Pender began to laugh.

"That's a good one," said Flapp.

"I suppose you used your tongue for a walking stick when you came over," said Tom. "It's long enough."

"Bah!" cried Rockley, and turned away in disgust.

"Those Rover boys have got the swelled head," muttered Flapp. "But we'll turn 'em down before the encampment is over, eh, fellows?"

"That's what," replied Rockley.

While the Rover boys were making their purchases Lew Flapp and his cronies turned back into the tavern. There was a billiard room in the rear and here they began to play billiards.

"We'll let the Rovers start for home first," said Rockley. "It will be safer."

CHAPTER XXI

A TUG OF WAR

When the Rover boys reached the vicinity of the Staton cottage they found Alice and Helen in the dooryard, watching for them.

"Mamma says you must come in," said Alice. "She wishes to see you."

"And papa wants to see you, too," added Helen.

"Thank you, we won't mind resting a bit," answered Dick. "The sun is rather hot."

They were soon seated on the broad porch, and here Mrs. Staton and her husband were introduced. They proved to be nice people, and both thanked the boys warmly for what they had done on the road.

"I've told Isaac Klem about that bull," said Mr. Staton. "Some day he'll do a whole lot of damage."

"We are going to keep a good lookout for him in the future," put in Alice. "I don't wish to be scared out of my wits again."

Before the boys left Mrs. Staton insisted on treating each to a piece of apple pie and a glass of milk.

"What did I tell you about pie?" whispered Tom. "Say, but it's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed!" whispered Sam.

The girls had a set of croquet on the lawn and asked the boys to play, but they had to decline for want of time.

All had moved to the rear of the cottage, under a wide-spreading tree, when Dick chanced to look toward the roadway and uttered an exclamation:

"Here come the other fellows now!"

"Yes, and look at the packages they are carrying," added Sam.

"And the bottles," came from Tom significantly.

Dick was about to step forward when Tom caught him by the arm.

"Let us keep shady, Dick."

"All right, Tom, if you say so."

Sam noticed that the faces of the two girls fell when Flapp and his cronies went past.

"Those are some of your chums, I suppose?" said Helen.

"They are some of the cadets, but no chums of ours," replied Dick.

"Oh!"

"They belong to a little crowd of their own." explained Tom. "We don't hitch very well, so that is why we let them go by unnoticed."

"We met them at the store in Oakville," said Alice.

"Did they speak to you?"

"Yes, but—but we did not want them to."

"Humph!" said Dick, and then the subject was changed.

Having invited the girls to come and look at the camp some pleasant day the Rover boys left the cottage and hurried along the road after Lew Flapp and his cronies.

"I'll wager those fellows made themselves obnoxious to the girls," said
Tom. "You could tell that by the way the girls looked."

"What do you think they are going to do with the stuff they are carrying?" came from Sam.

"I believe they intend to smuggle it into camp," replied Dick. "And if that is so, I don't know but what it is my duty to report them."

"If you do that, Flapp will consider you the worst kind of a spy, Dick."

"Perhaps, but as a captain of the command it is my duty to see that such things are kept out of camp."

"Well, do what you think is best."

"Better make sure that the stuff they are carrying isn't all right," said Sam. "They may have nothing but soda in those bottles."

They hurried along faster than ever but, strange to say, failed to catch up to Lew Flapp and his cronies, who were making for the hermit's den with all possible speed.

"Maybe they got scared, thinking we might be spying on them," suggested Tom, and hit upon the exact truth of the matter.

After that nearly a week passed in camp without anything unusual happening. Lew Flapp and his cronies kept their distance, and so strict was the guard set by Captain Putnam and his assistants that hazing became, for the time being, out of the question.

To pass the time more pleasantly some of the cadets organized several tug-of-war teams. This sort of thing pleased Tom very much and he readily consented to act as anchor man on one of the teams. Another team had Pender for an anchor man, with Rockley and seven others on the rope.

"Let us have a regular contest," said one of the cadets, and all was arranged for a match on the following morning after drill.

The students were enthusiastic over the match, some thinking one side would win and others favoring the opponents.

"Tom's crowd will win that match," said Sam.

"What makes you so sure?" questioned Ben Hurdy.

"Oh, Tom knows how to pull and how to manage the others."

"And so does Rockley know how to pull," continued Hurdy. "And what is more, he knows a trick or two that will pull your fellows over the line in no time."

"I don't believe it, Hurdy."

"Want to bet?"

"No, I don't bet. Just the same, I think Rockley's crowd will lose."

Although Sam would not bet, some of the other students did, so that by the time the match was to come off quite a sum was up.

George Strong had been chosen as starter and umpire. On the green a line of white was laid down, and the team pulling the other over this line would be the winner.

For the contest Captain Putnam provided a new rope of proper size. To each end was attached a belt for the anchor men, and there was ample room on each side of the line for the eight cadets on the rope.

"All ready?" questioned George Strong, when the time had come for the contest.

"All ready on this end," replied Tom, seeing to it that each of his team was in his proper position and had a proper hold on the rope.

"All ready here," said Rockley, a few seconds later.

"Drop!" cried the teacher, and down went the two teams like a flash, each pulling for all it knew how. But neither gained an inch at the fall, so the start-off was perfect.

"Now pull for all you're worth, Rovers!" cried one cadet.

"Haul 'em over, Rockleys!" cried another.

"Steady, boys!" whispered Tom. "Don't get nervous. There is lots of time."

He was almost flat on his back, with both feet braced firmly in the soil. Rockley was also down, and it looked as if it might be well-nigh impossible to budge either.

"This is a dandy tug of war," said Fred Garrison. "Neither has got an inch of advantage."

"The Rovers will beat!"

"The Rockleys will win!"

"I think it will be a tie," said another.

The strain was terrific and soon each member of the two teams was bathed in perspiration.

"Here is where you earn your rations!" cried one cadet, and this caused a general laugh.

"Watch your chances, Tom," whispered Dick, and his brother nodded to show that he understood.

Both sides were glaring at each other. The strain was beginning to tell, but so far nobody had thought of letting up in the least.

But now Tom saw two of Rockley's men "getting their wind" as it is called. They still held on to the rope, but were hardly pulling at all.

"Up!" cried Tom suddenly, and his men went up like a flash. "Down!" came the cry, an instant later, and down they went, before Rockley's men could recover.

"Hurrah! the Rovers have gained four inches!" came the shout. And then those who favored that team set up a cheer.

It was true, the rope had shifted over four inches. Rockley was angry, but could do nothing.

"Mind yourselves, Wilson and Brady!" he whispered. "Don't let up a minute."

"I didn't let up," growled Wilson. "It was Chambers."

"Not much!" growled Chambers. "I wasn't—"

"Up!" cried Tom again. "Down! Up! Pull, pull! pull! Down!"

Up and down went the team twice, the second time hauling the rope forward over a foot. Then they went down once more and anchored as firmly as ever.

"Good!" shouted Sam enthusiastically. "You're doing it, boys! Keep it up!"

"Are they?" sneered Lew Flapp. "Just you wait and see."

He had a little roll of paper in his hand, and watching his opportunity he blew the contents into the air, directly over the team led by Tom Rover. The paper contained pepper and it set several of Tom's men to sneezing.

This trick had been arranged between Flapp and Rockley, the latter feeling certain that Tom and his followers could not sneeze and pull at the same time.

"Up!" yelled Rockley. "Pull! pull! pull!"

"Stay down!" roared Tom. "Down! Don't give in an inch!"

But the cry could not be obeyed. Half the team was up and sneezing and before order could be restored the rope had gone over to the Rockleys' side a distance of two and a half feet.

"Hurrah, the Rockleys are winning!" yelled Ben Hurdy. "Haul 'em over, boys!"

"Down!" ordered Tom.

"What on earth made the men sneeze?" demanded Dick, gazing around sharply.

"Smells like pepper," replied Major Larry Colby, who was close at hand.

"Would anybody be mean enough to use that?"

"Perhaps."

"Up!" cried Rockley once more. "Pull! pull! pull!"

His team gave a savage haul as ordered, and up came Tom's men in spite of themselves. Then began a tug of war in dead earnest, with the rope nearly three feet in the Rockleys' favor.

CHAPTER XXII

A SWIM AND SOME SNAKES

The majority of the cadets were now inclined to think that Rockley's team would win the contest. They had seen Tom's followers sneezing, but thought this might come from the dampness of the ground.

"Don't give in, Tom!" cried Sam, dancing around. "You've got to beat him!"

"Bah! you act like a monkey," said Lew Flapp. "Rockley's fellows are bound to win."

In the meantime the rope was moving rapidly backward and forward. Once
Rockley and his men had Tom's team dangerously close to the line. But Tom ordered a drop and there the team clung, refusing to budge an inch further.

"Time is almost up," said George Strong. "Three minutes more!"

"Up!" cried Rockley.

"Up and pull for all you are worth!" cried Tom. "Pull, I tell you! Make every ounce of muscle count!"

And pull Tom's team did as never before, and Tom with them, watching for the first sign of returning weakness. But the team was now on its mettle and made the Rockleys come over the line in spite of the frantic orders from Rockley himself to drop.

"It's ours!" screamed Tom, and with a final haul brought the opponents over the line with a rush. Rockley, flat on his back on the grass, trying in

vain to dig his heels into the soil, and the others floundering just as vainly.

A cheer went up for Tom's team, while Rockley and his followers left the field in disgust.

"It was well won, Tom!" said Dick enthusiastically. "I never saw a better tug of war in my life."

"I'd like to know who threw that pepper," answered Tom, with an angry glance toward Lew Flapp and his cronies.

"Did somebody throw pepper?" asked Mr. Strong.

"I think they did, although I'm not sure. Anyway, something came along and made the most of us sneeze."

"It's too bad, Rover. I'll try to make sure of this," said the teacher. But though he made an investigation nothing came of it.

Some of the cadets were so delighted with the success of Tom's team that they took Tom on their shoulders and marched around the entire encampment with him.

"I tell you, Rockley feels sore," said Sam, a little later.

"Around the belt?" asked Tom with a grin.

"I mean in his mind. He and Lew Flapp are having a regular quarrel over the contest. I guess Flapp lost some money."

"Perhaps, if he has, it will cure him of betting," put in Dick.

Sam and Tom had received permission to go to the upper end of the lake in one of the rowboats on the following afternoon. Songbird Powell and Fred Garrison went along, and all took their fishing outfits and plenty of bait.

"Bring home a nice mess of fish," said Dick, on parting with his brothers. "Sorry I can't go with you."

"Oh, you'll have company enough," declared Sam. "I heard that some of the country folks are going to visit the encampment to-day and perhaps those Staton girls will be among them."

The four boys were soon on the way, two rowing at a time. The weather was ideal, and the water as smooth as that of a mill pond.

"What a beautiful spot this is," declared Fred, as they glided long. "I'm sure Captain Putnam could not have selected a better."

"I have already gotten some splendid pictures," returned Powell, who possessed a good snap-shot camera, now lying on the stern seat of the boat. "I'm going to take some more pictures to-day."

On the way to the upper end of the lake Sam did a little fishing and brought in one bass of fair size.

"This makes a fellow feel like a true poet," murmured Powell, gazing dreamily at the water, and then he went on:

"I love to glide,
By the green-clad side
Of the glassy lake,
And there to take
My ease with book
Or line and hook,
And spend the day
Far, far away
From care and toil,
On Nature's soil."

"Just to listen to Songbird!" cried Tom. "He grinds it out like a regular sausage-making machine," and then he went on gayly:

"I love to swim,
In Nature's soil,
By the green-clad side,
Of a mountain wide,

And there to bake,
My little toes,
On a garden rose,
And take a hose,
And wet the lake
With a hot snowflake,
In the middle of June—
If that isn't too soon—
And sail to the moon
In a big balloon—"

"Oh, Tom, let up!" roared Fred. "Talk about a sausage-making machine—"

"And when in the moon,
I'd drive a stake,
And tie my lake
Fast to a star,
Or a trolley car,
Then jump in a sack
And ride right back—"

"To where you belong,
And stop that song!"

finished Sam. "Oh, but that's the worst yet. Shall we duck him, Fred?"

"No, don't pollute the water," answered Garrison.

"He ought to be ducked," came from Powell, in disgust. "Whenever I have a poetic streak—"

"It's catching, as the fly-paper said to the fly," finished Tom. "Let's call it square and take a new tack. Who's in for a swim when we reach the end of the lake?"

"I am!" was the united cry from the others. They were passing several small islands and now came to another turn in Bass Lake. Just beyond

this was a small sandy beach, backed up by a mass of rocks and brushwood.

"That looks like a good place for a swim," said Powell, forgetting all about his so-called poetry.

"Suits me," returned Tom. "Let's pull ashore and tie the boat fast, and I'll put up—"

"A peanut reward for the first fellow in," finished Fred. "Caught you that time, Tom, just as you caught Songbird with his doggerel."

As happy as any boys could be, the four cadets tied up their boat. In doing this one started to splash in the water, followed by another, and as a consequence before the cutting-up came to a finish the seats of the craft were pretty well wetted.

"Never mind," said Tom. "They'll soon dry in the sun. We can put our clothes on the rocks."

The boys were soon in the water and having a most glorious time. The lake was fairly deep off the end of the boat and here they took turns at diving. Fred and Songbird also went in for a race, the former coming in only a few feet ahead.

"I guess we had better dress now and try our hand at fishing," said Sam after nearly an hour had passed.

"One more dive!" cried Tom and took one full of grace, to the very bottom of the lake.

As Tom came up to the surface he heard a cry from Sam, quickly followed by a yell from Fred.

"What's up?" he called out, swimming toward the shore.

"Land on the boat, Tom!" cried Sam, and leaped into the craft, followed by Fred and Powell.

"All right; but what is wrong?" asked Tom, and climbed tip over the stern.

"We can't get our clothes."

"Why not?"

"Look for yourself."

Tom looked and gave a low whistle of astonishment. And not without good reason, for there on the rocks where they had left their garments rested a big black snake!

"This is interesting truly," murmured the boy, gazing at his companions in dismay.

"I'm going to get a rock and throw it at the snake," said Sam.

A stone was close to the boat, and watching his chance, he picked it up and threw it at the reptile.

The snake darted to one side. It was merely grazed by the rock and now it hissed viciously.

The hiss appeared to be a signal, and in a moment more another snake and then another appeared, until fully a dozen reptiles each a yard or more in length covered the rocks where all of the cadets' wearing apparel rested!

CHAPTER XXIII

A GLIMPSE OF AN OLD ENEMY

"We are in a pickle now and no mistake!" groaned Fred Garrison. He hated snakes as much as he did poison.

"It's certainly bad," declared Songbird Powell. "I wonder what we had best do?"

"Has anybody got a pistol?"

Nobody had, nor was there any weapon handy outside of a jackknife and a fishing rod.

"If we only had a shot-gun," sighed Sam.

"But we haven't one and we must do the best we can without it," answered Tom. "Songbird, supposing you try to charm 'em with some of that soothing poetry of yours. Or take a picture of 'em."

"This is no joke," growled Powell. "I want my clothes."

"Well, go ahead and take 'em—I shan't stop you."

"I'm going to get another rock," said Sam.

"Let us all get stones," suggested Tom. "Then we can throw together."

This was thought to be a good idea, and soon the stones were secured and each cadet took careful aim.

Three of the snakes were hit, one quite seriously. These retreated, but the other snakes remained as defiant as ever.

"There must be a nest under the rocks," said Tom. "Were that not so I am sure the snakes would leave at once."

"I've got another idea!" cried Fred. "Why didn't we think of it before?"

"I haven't thought of it yet, Fred," grinned Tom. "What is it?"

"Let us take our fishing rods and tie one fast to another. Then we can turn the boat around and go fishing on the rocks for our clothes."

"That's the talk," rejoined Powell. "A good idea, Fred."

Three of the rods were pieced together, making a fishing pole over thirty feet long. The boat was then swung around, and while two kept the craft in place the others went fishing for the clothing.

The task was not so easy as it looked, and the snakes whipped around and hissed in a most alarming fashion. More than once they had a coat or other garment on the pole only to drop it again. But they persevered and soon had everything on board but Fred's shirt and one of Tom's shoes.

"Here comes the shirt," cried Tom, at last, and landed the garment in the bow of the rowboat.

"And a snake with it!" screamed Sam. "Look out, everybody!"

Sam was right, the snake was there and in a trice was whipping around under the seat.

"Stamp on him, Fred!" cried Tom, and Garrison, who had his shoes on, did so. Then Tom caught the reptile by the tail and flung it into the lake.

After this there was but little trouble in getting the remaining shoe, and with this aboard they sent the rowboat out into the lake and lost no time in finishing their dressing.

"This was a truly horrible experience," was Sam's comment, after the excitement had died down. "Gracious, I feel as if the snakes were crawling around me this minute!"

"Don't say that," said Fred with a shudder. "You make me feel as if there was another snake in my shirt."

"The best thing to do is to forget the snakes," put in Songbird Powell. "Let us row around to the other side of the lake."

All were willing, and soon the vicinity was left far behind. Then they came to where a fair sized brook flowed into Bass Lake, and here they came to anchor and began to fish, while Powell took several photographs.

"I have always found it good fishing near a brook like that," said Tom. "The fish come around looking for food from the brook."

Tom's remark was evidently true, for in less than an hour each of the boys had a good sized string of fish to his credit.

In the excitement of the sport the cadets forgot all about the adventure with the snakes, nor did they pay much attention to the flight of time until Fred Garrison glanced at his watch.

"Gee Christopher!" he ejaculated.

"What time is it?" asked Powell.

"Half-past four."

"And we promised to be back at five-thirty!" put in Sam. "We'll have to hustle, fellows."

"Oh, we can get back in an hour easily enough," put in Tom.

"But we've got to clean out the boat and clean up ourselves," came from
Fred. "Come, fellows, wind up and put away your hooks and poles."

He started and the others followed. Then Fred and Powell took the oars, and the return to camp was begun. Not caring to go back the same way they had come, they sped along the opposite shore of the lake, where were located several coves and cliffs of rock.

"This is as pretty as the other shore," remarked Songbird. And he began:

"Oh, dreamy days in summer time,
When purling brooks and shady nooks—"

"If you start up again I'll jump overboard," interrupted Tom.

"Do so, you need a cooling off," grunted Powell; but that was the end of the poetry for the time being.

They were just passing one of the coves when they caught sight of a man sitting on an overhanging tree, fishing.

"Hullo, what luck?" cried Fred, good-naturedly.

"Fair," was the somewhat surly answer. Then, as the man caught sight of the others in the boat, he turned his head away.

"That fellow looks familiar to me," ejaculated Sam, in sudden and strong excitement.

"And he looks familiar to me, too," exclaimed Tom.

"Do you think it is Arnold Baxter?"

"If it isn't, it's his double," went on Tom. "Row the boat over quick, boys."

"Who is this Arnold Baxter? The father of Dan Baxter?" questioned Fred.

"The same, Fred."

"The fellow who escaped from prison, or the hospital?" asked Powell.

"That's the chap."

Without delay the rowboat was turned in toward the overhanging tree.

Scarcely had this been done when the fisherman pulled in his line with all speed, took up his string of fish and ran into the bushes between two cliffs of rocks.

"He is getting out, and in a hurry too!" said Fred.

"Hi, there, stop! We want to talk to you!" sang out Tom, at the top of his lungs.

"Ain't got time," roared back the strange fisherman, and on the instant he was gone.

"It must have been Arnold Baxter, beyond a doubt," said Sam.

"If it was, what is he doing here?" questioned his brother.

"He's keeping out of the reach of the law," answered Powell. "I suppose he thought he was perfectly safe in such an out-of-the-way place as this."

"And he was fishing just to kill time," put in Fred.

"I'd like to go after him and make sure," went on Tom. "What do you say, Sam?"

"I am with you."

"But we may be late—" began Fred.

"Oh, Captain Putnam will excuse us when I tell him what delayed us."

The rowboat soon reached the shore, and Sam and Tom leaped to the brushwood, where the trail of the vanished fisherman was plainly to be seen.

It was decided that Fred and Powell should remain in charge of the rowboat, so that nobody might come and make off with the craft. Leaving their fishing outfits behind them the two Rover boys struck out through the bushes, and soon gained a narrow forest path running through the woods that skirted this section of Bass Lake.

"I wish we could catch Baxter," said Tom, on the way. "It would be a feather in our cap, Sam."

"We must be careful. More than likely he is armed, and he won't hesitate to shoot if he is cornered."

"Oh, I know that. The most we can do is to follow him until we reach some place where we can summon assistance."

The path led deeper and deeper into the woods and then along a fairsized brook. They kept their eyes wide open, but could see nothing excepting a number of birds and an occasional squirrel or chipmunk. Once they heard the distant bark of a fox and this was the only sound that broke the stillness.

"It's rather a lonely place," said Sam, after a silence lasting several minutes. "I must say I shouldn't like to meet Arnold Baxter here alone."

"For all we know he may be watching us from behind some tree."

Several times they got down to examine the path. Footprints could be seen quite plainly, but neither of the boys was expert enough at trailing to tell whether these prints had been made recently or not.

"It would take an Indian scout to make sure of these footmarks," said Tom. "They are beyond me."

"Let us go a bit further," returned his brother. "Then if we don't see anything, we may as well go back to the lake."

"Hark!"

They listened intently and at a distance heard a crashing in the brushwood.

"That sounded as if somebody had jumped across the brook, Tom!"

"Just what I should say, Sam. Come on!"

Again they went forward, a distance of thirty or forty yards. At this point the path seemed to dwindle down to little or nothing.

"We have come to the end of the trail," was Tom's comment, as he gazed around sharply.

"Do you see anything?" queried his brother.

"Nothing much. One or two of the bushes over yonder seem to be brushed aside and broken."

"What do you think we had best do now?"

"Listen!"

Both remained silent for several minutes, but nothing out of the ordinary reached their ears.

"We may as well give it up, Sam. It is growing dark and there is no telling where this search would lead us. We might even get lost in the woods."

They retraced their steps as quickly as they could to where they had left the rowboat.

"What luck?" queried Fred.

"None; he got away from us."

"It's too bad," said Powell; and then the return to the camp was made without further delay.

CHAPTER XXIV

MORE RIVALRY

"Do you mean to tell me that you saw Arnold Baxter?" exclaimed Dick, after listening to Sam and Tom's story.

"We did," replied the youngest Rover. "There was no mistake?"

"If it wasn't Arnold Baxter do you think he would take such pains to get out of our reach?" asked Tom.

"That is true, Tom. But it seems so unnatural. What can he be doing in this out-of-the-way place?"

"As Powell says, he must be keeping out of the reach of the law. Perhaps he expects to keep shady until this affair blows over."

"As if it would blow over!" cried Sam. "Dick, we ought to do something."

Captain Putnam had already learned why the four cadets had been late in returning to camp. The Rovers now went to consult him further.

"I agree, something should be done," said the captain. "Perhaps you had better go to the nearest telegraph office, Richard, and telegraph to your folks. You might also get some of the local authorities to take up the hunt for this criminal."

"Who are the local authorities?"

"I really don't know, but we can find out at Oakville."

In the end Dick and Tom received permission to leave camp for an indefinite time. Late as it was, they hurried to Oakville and caught the telegraph operator at the little railroad station just as he was shutting up for the night.

Having sent the message to their father they made inquiries of the operator and learned that the town boasted of a Judge Perkins and that the local constable was Munro Staton.

"Do you mean the farmer who lives down on the road to Bass Lake?" asked
Dick. "The man who has twin daughters?"

"That's the man."

"Why, he was in camp to-day, with his daughters," cried Dick. "Wish I had known of this before. I might have hired him to make a hunt for the fellow we are after. Where does that judge live?"

"Sorry, but he went to New York yesterday and won't be back for several days."

The boys said no more, but without delay turned away from Oakville and made their way to the Staton farmhouse.

"Hullo! I didn't expect to see you again to-day!" exclaimed Munro Staton, as he opened the door for them. "Come in."

They entered, to find the girls sewing and Mrs. Staton darning stockings. Mr. Staton had been reading his favorite weekly newspaper.

"We have come on a very important errand, Mr. Staton," began Dick. "We have been down to Oakville and learned there that you are the local police officer."

"Ah! Do you want somebody arrested?"

"If it can be done."

"Somebody at the camp?" put in Helen.

"No, I wish he was at the camp," said Tom. "But I'm afraid he is miles away."

All of the Statons were interested and listened to the tale Tom and Dick had to tell with close attention.

"Seems to me I've heard of this Baxter and his son," said Munro Staton, scratching his head. "How does he look?"

As well as he was able Tom described the man, while Dick took a sheet of paper and a pencil and made a rough but life-like sketch of the individual.

"Why, you are quite an artist!" said Alice Staton as she gazed at the picture. "I'm sure I'd recognize that man if I met him."

"So would I," added her father. "Can I keep this picture?"

"To be sure," replied Dick. "Now, Mr. Staton, to come to business. What are your services as constable worth a day?"

"Oh, about two or two dollars and a half."

"Well if you will start a hunt for this man Baxter at once I'll guarantee you three dollars per day for a week or two, and if you succeed in landing him in jail I'll guarantee you a reward of one hundred dollars. I know my father will pay that amount willingly."

"And if he won't, I will," said Tom.

"You must be rich."

"We are fairly rich, Mr. Staton. This man is a great criminal and has been an enemy to our family for years. We don't want to see him at large."

"Well, I'll take the job and do the best I can for you," said Munro Staton and arose to his feet. "My hired man can run the farm while I am gone."

He said he knew the spot where the boys had first seen Arnold Baxter, and he would visit it at sunrise the next day and take up the trail as best he could.

"That trail through the woods used to lead to the village of Hopdale," he said. "Perhaps I'll learn something about him over there."

"I sincerely hope that you do," returned Dick.

The boys, and especially Tom, were worn out with traveling and readily consented to borrow a horse from Munro Staton, on which to ride back to camp. The steed was returned early in the morning.

"It's rather a wild-goose chase," said Dick, in talking matters over with his brothers. "But I don't know of anything else to do. Mr. Staton may catch Baxter quicker than a metropolitan detective could do the job."

Three days passed, and during that time the boys received two telegrams from home, stating they should do as they thought best in the Baxter affair, and that a detective was on the way. Then the detective appeared at the camp and followed Munro Staton on the hunt for the missing criminal. But the search by both men proved useless, and nothing more was seen of Arnold Baxter for the time being.

The cadets had arranged for a series of athletic contests, to come off at the beginning of the following week. There was to be broad and high jumping, and running, as well as throwing the hammer. All of the students were interested, and for some time these contests formed the total subject of conversation.

The cadets to enter for the various events, eight in number, were those already introduced in these pages and a dozen or fifteen in addition, all lively, wide-awake youths, each of whom looked as if he would do his best to win.

In a manner not to be easily explained, the camp divided itself into two factions, one led by Dick and Major Larry, and the other led by Lew

Flapp and Pender. To the former belonged the Rovers and their numerous chums, and to the latter Rockley, Ben Hurdy, and boys of a similar turn. Each crowd had one or more followers entered for every event and, as before, numerous wagers were made as to which person and which crowd would win.

Dick had entered for the high jump, Tom for the hammer throwing, and Sam for a half mile race for cadets of his own class. The boys practiced a good deal, although not always where the others could see what they were doing.

The day for the contests was a perfect one and as news of the events had traveled to Oakville and other places, quite a respectable crowd of outsiders came to the camp to witness the affair.

"I hope you Rover boys win," said Alice Staton, who had come with her twin sister and her mother in a buggy.

"Thank you," returned Dick politely. "We shall certainly do our best. But you must remember that we have some first-class athletes at this academy."

"Oh, I don't doubt it. All academies have them," put in Helen Staton.

The first event to come off was the hammer throwing, to take place in the middle of the parade ground. There were four entries for this, Tom, as already mentioned, Jackson, Powell, and a big boy named Larson.

Larson, who belonged to the Flapp crowd, was looked on as the probable winner, for he handled the hammer exceedingly well. But Jackson could also throw, as the others well knew. Nothing was known about the skill of Tom or Powell in this direction.

The contest began with a throw by Powell. It was not very good and Jackson outdistanced him by three feet.

"That's the style, Jackson!" cried Lew Flapp. "Show 'em what you can do."

"This is the day our crowd comes out on top," put in Pender.

"Crowing rather early, seems to me," came from Fred Garrison dryly.

It was now Tom's turn and he threw the hammer with all the force at his command. It fell just beyond the point reached by Jackson.

"Good for you, Tom!" cried Sam. "That's the way to do it."

"Humph! Just wait till Larson takes his turn," came from a Flapp follower.

Larson stepped to the mark with the air of one who knows just what he is doing. Up went the hammer with a long swing—to land in the very spot where Tom had thrown it.

"A tie! A tie!" was the cry.

"Well done, Larson!" came from Lew Flapp, but he was by no means satisfied over the showing made.

Being tied, it was necessary for Tom and Larson to throw once more, and again Tom took his position at the mark.

"Be careful, Tom," whispered Dick. "Take your time."

Again the hammer swung up into the air and went sailing forward.

"Hurrah, eight inches beyond his first mark!" came the cry.

"Larson will have to hump himself to beat that!"

It was now Larson's turn and he stepped to the mark with a quick, earnest air. He realized that he must do his best if he expected to beat Tom.

Jackson had picked up the hammer and he it was who had handed the article to Tom.

As Larson swung the hammer on high Tom cried out quickly:

"Stop!"

"What's the matter with you?" cried Jackson uglily.

"I want Captain Putnam to examine that hammer."

"There ain't nothing wrong with it."

"Possibly not. But please remember that I used the one marked A."

"So did I," came from Powell.

Captain Putnam brushed forward.

"I will look at that hammer, please," he said to Larson quietly. He knew that the cadets had several hammers for practicing throwing in the camp.

"I—I guess it's all right," faltered Larson. "This hammer is marked B."

"B!" cried Tom. "That B hammer is about half a pound lighter than the one marked A."

"It ain't so!" yelled Jackson.

"Let me see the hammer marked A," said the captain, and it was brought from the spot where Jackson had thrown it. "It is certainly heavier than this one," he went on. "Jackson, what do you mean by making such a substitution?"

"I—er—I didn't know there was any difference."

"But why did you make the change at all?"

"I—er—I knew Larson liked this hammer better. The handle just suits him."

"That is so," replied Larson blandly.

"We will try the contest over again," said Captain Putnam. "And every contestant will use the hammer marked A."

"I don't like the hammer marked A," grumbled Larson.

"I would just as lief use the hammer marked B," said Tom quickly.

"So would I," added Powell, who felt he could not win anyway.

"Very well then, we will use the hammer marked B," said Captain Putnam. "And after this, Jackson, be sure of what you are doing," he added sharply, and at the words the boy who had tried to work such a mean trick was glad enough to slink back out of sight as much as possible.

CHAPTER XXV

WINNING THE CONTESTS

Powell was again the first to throw the hammer and this time it went two feet beyond his first mark.

"Good for you, Songbird!" said Tom. "I wish you had made it a yard."

Jackson came up with a scowling face. He did his best, but this time fell behind Powell by four inches.

"You ought to have stuck to the other hammer, Jackson," laughed the youth who composed songs.

"Don't you throw that up to me!" whispered Jackson fiercely. "If you do
I'll hammer you for it."

"Is that meant for a pun, Jackson?"

"No, it ain't. I won't stand being slurred. I'll pound you good."

"With the hammer?"

"No, with my fists."

"Really? Well, you'll have to spell able first." Tom came next, as before, and now the hammer flew out four feet and nine inches beyond his first mark.

"That shows what the other hammer can do," said Major Larry.

Larson was as much out of sorts as Jackson, but nevertheless he resolved to do his best to win the contest. Up went the hammer with a

mighty swing and circled through the air. But the throw was behind that of Tom by fourteen inches.

"Hurrah! Tom Rover wins!" was the cry, and many rushed forward to congratulate him, while Larson and Jackson retired as quickly as they could and in great disgust.

The next contest was a dash of two hundred yards and was won by a boy named Bird.

"He's a bird!" sang out Tom loudly, and at this the crowd laughed heartily.

Then came a race of a quarter of a mile for the little cadets and this was won by Harry Moss, with Joe Davis a close second. Lew Flapp had backed up Ben Hurdy, but cigarettes had done their work on Hurdy and his wind gave out long before the race came to a finish.

"Good for you, Harry," said Dick, slapping the little cadet on the back. "That was a fine run you made. And your run was almost as good, Joe," he added, to Davis.

"I don't care if I did lose," panted Davis. "Both of us beat Ben Hurdy hollow, and that's all I wanted to do."

"Oh, there's no moss growing on Moss," cried Tom, and this brought out another laugh.

The next contest to come off was the high jump, for which Dick had entered, along with Pender, Rockley, and four others, including Hans Mueller. What had possessed the German boy to enter was beyond finding out, for he could scarcely jump at all. Yet many, for the fun of it, told him they thought he would surely win.

"Oh, you'll outjump everybody," said Sam. "None of 'em will come anywhere near you."

"Dot's it! Dot's it!" cried Hans excitedly. "I vos chump so high like nefer vos, ain't it?"

A lad named Lemon was the first to go over the bar, at a height of four feet and two inches. Another cadet followed, going him two inches better.

"Now, Hans, see what you can do," said Major Larry.

"Vos it mine turn to chump?"

"Yes. Are you ready?"

"Sure I vos."

"How high up shall they place the stick?"

"Apout like dot," and Hans pointed to the top of his head.

"All right, fellows, up she goes!" sang out Tom, and the stick went up.

Hans spat on his hands as if going to lift something. Then he squared his shoulders and drew far back from the jumping place.

"Gif me lots of room, eferypotty!" he sang out.

"All the room you want, Dutchy!" cried one of the cadets.

Away Hans started for the stick, running as swiftly as his short legs would carry him. When about ten feet away he made a wild leap, stuck up both legs in the air, and came down flat on his back with a loud whack.

"Hurrah, Hans wins!" cried Tom. "Best fall I've seen in a year!"

"Wh—who—vat—" gasped Hans, trying to recover his wind. "Who knocked me der pack ofer annahow?"

"Nobody hit you, Hans."

"Who put geese grease der groundt on ver I run, hey?"

"Nobody."

"Well, did I knock der stick town?"

"No, you didn't come anywhere near the stick."

"Do I got some more trials?"

"I think, Mueller, that you had better retire," said Captain Putnam with a smile. "High jumping does not seem to agree with you."

"Maype dot's so, captain. Veil, I ton't care annahow. I vill drow der hammer ven ve haf some more of dem kondests," and then Hans dropped to the rear.

Rockley was the next to jump, and his record was an inch better than that already made.

"That's all right," said Lew Flapp.

Two other pupils now took their turns in jumping and Rockley's record was speedily eclipsed. Then Dick came along and sent the record still higher.

"That's the talk, Dick," said Tom enthusiastically. "I don't think Pender can do as well."

"Can't I," sneered Pender. "I'll show you."

On he came, measuring his distance with care, and went over the stick at the same height Dick had taken.

"Another tie!" was the cry.

The last boy to jump did not do as well as Rockley, so the contest was voted a tie between Dick and Gus Pender.

"Now, Dick, you must win," said Sam.

"You think a good lot of his ability," sneered Lew Flapp, who stood close by, and started to walk off.

He had scarcely taken a step when Dick gave him a quick shove that sent the tall boy flat on his face.

"I'll teach you to step on my foot, Lew Flapp!" he cried hotly.

"What's the trouble?" demanded several, while Mr. Strong came forward to investigate.

"Lew Flapp stepped on my right foot, and he did it just as hard as he could," said Dick.

"I—I didn't," growled Flapp.

"I say you did—and what is more, I think you did it on purpose."

"He did it to lame you, so you couldn't jump against Pender," came from
Tom.

"Flapp, did you step on Rover's foot on purpose?" demanded George Strong.

"No, sir—didn't step on it at all."

"It is very strange. Rover says you did."

"He is mistaken."

"I am not mistaken. That is why I shoved him away, Mr. Strong."

"Is your foot hurt?"

"I don't think it is. But it didn't do it any good to have it stepped on."

"Probably not. Do you still wish to jump?"

"Yes, sir. If I don't, some of the crowd will say I am afraid," said Dick.

"In the future, Flapp, be more careful," said George Strong significantly.

"By Jinks! but the Flapp crowd are dandies!" whispered Tom. "First Jackson tried to change the hammers and now Flapp himself tries to disable you. We must be on our guard after this."

"That's true," replied his elder brother, and Sam nodded.

Because of Dick's hurt foot it was decided that Gus Pender should jump first. Pender did his best, clearing the stick by two inches better than before.

"Put it up an inch higher," cried Dick, and made the jump, despite a pain in the instep that was by no means pleasant. Then Pender tried again, but failed, and Dick was declared the winner.

"This is the day for the Rovers!" cried one cadet, and a cheer for Tom and Dick followed, while the Staton girls waved their handkerchiefs wildly.

After this came several other contests, in each of which the crowd pitted against the Flapp faction won. This made Lew Flapp, Rockley, Pender, Jackson and a number of others feel very sore.

"We must win something," cried Pender fiercely. "If we don't we'll be the laughing stock of the whole academy."

At last came the half mile race for which Sam had entered. Now, though Lew Flapp was much larger than most of the others, he was in the same class as Sam, and he had also entered this race, which boasted of ten contestants, including William Philander Tubbs.

"You have got to win this, Lew," said Rockley. "It ought to be easy for you, with such long legs."

"I mean to win and leave that Rover boy so far behind he'll feel sick," answered Flapp.

Sam had but little to say. But he knew that both Tom and Dick expected him to win, and he resolved to "do or die" as the saying goes.

"Even if I lose they shan't say I didn't try," the youngest Rover told himself.

Out on the field William Philander Tubbs was strutting around boastfully.

"I can't help but win, don't you know," he drawled. "Running is exactly in my line."

"Oh, what a whopper!" was Fred Garrison's comment. "Tubbs is about as lazy as they make 'em."

Soon all of the contestants were ready, and George Strong explained the conditions of the race.

"You are to run along the shore to the big rock where Lieutenant Merrick is stationed," he said. "You are to round the rock by running to the right, and you must keep to the right of the path on returning, so that you won't run into anybody. The first to reach this mark on the return wins the race. Do you understand?"

The runners said that they did.

"Very well then. Get ready. Go!"

Away piled the boys in a line that did not break for several yards. Then Sam Rover shot ahead, followed by Flapp and two cadets named Pigley and Franell.

"There they go!" was the shout.

"Leg it, Sam!" yelled Tom. "Leg it, old man!"

"Go it, Flapp! Don't let them win this race!"

"It's yours if you want it, Franell!"

"Remember how you won the race at Ithaca, Pigley!"

So the cries went on, while the outsiders cheered for nobody in particular.

"Oh, I hope that Rover boy wins," said Alice Staton to her sister.

"So do I," answered Helen.

"By Jove, but I think I'll rest a bit!" panted William Philander Tubbs, after running a couple of hundred yards, and he sat down on the grass, while the crowd laughed at him.

Sam was keeping the lead in good shape, although hard pressed by Flapp, Pigley, and Franell. His wind was good and he was running with a grace which brought forth much favorable comment.

"Whether he wins or not, he is the most graceful runner in the school," whispered George Strong to Captain Putnam. "I never saw his equal."

"You are right, Strong," answered the captain. "I'll tell you what," he added. "They are a great trio, those Rover boys. One cannot help but love them, in spite of their tricks and occasional wrong-doings."

"I agree, Captain Putnam. And I must say I do not find their wrong-doings so very great either," concluded George Strong.

The rock that was the turning point in the race was now almost gained. Sam still led, but Flapp was right at one shoulder, with Pigley at the other. Franell, at a look from Flapp, had dropped behind.

On the rock stood the lieutenant George Strong had mentioned. He was friendly to Lew Flapp and as Sam swept around the rock, he leaned forward, making the youngest Rover run about a yard further than was necessary. Then he allowed Flapp to cut the rock closely.

But Sam was on his mettle and now bounded ahead faster than ever, leaving Flapp and Pigley several yards in the rear.

"Confound him," thought Lew Flapp. "He'll win sure, unless Franell does as he agreed—good!"

Flapp almost shouted the word, as he saw Sam run into Franell with a crash and go down. The other boy had crossed the running path and gotten directly into Sam's way.

"I see you are out of it!" cried Flapp gleefully, as he shot by the prostrate figure.

"It was a trick!" muttered Sam to himself, and tried to rise to his feet. But the wind was knocked completely out of him and before he could recover the race was over, and Lew Flapp had come in ahead.

CHAPTER XXVI

SAM SHOWS WHAT HE CAN DO

"It was another trick. He knocked me down on purpose."

Thus spoke Sam, as soon as he could get a hearing.

"Well, if that isn't beastly!" cried Franell, in apparent surprise. "I knocked him over! Why the little clown plumped right into me!

"Were you running on your side of the path?" questioned George Strong.

"I was, sir. Flapp and Pigley can prove it."

"That's right, Mr. Strong," said Lew Flapp.

"It was entirely Rover's fault," added Pigley. "He didn't keep to the right as he should."

The other runners were questioned, but could give no testimony, as they had not been close enough at the time of the collision.

"It is too bad it happened," said Captain Putnam.

"I would have won if it hadn't been for the fall," said Sam bitterly. "I was in the lead."

"Yes, but you were about winded," said Flapp. "I saw you getting groggy. That's what made you fall into Franell, I guess."

This remark made the youngest Rover more angry than ever.

"Mr. Strong," he said, turning to the head teacher suddenly, "will you do me a favor?"

"What do you wish, Rover?"

"Will you time me if I run that race over again?"

"You mean to run it over alone?"

"Yes, sir—unless Flapp will run against me."

"I've won the race and that's all there is to it," grumbled the tall boy doggedly.

"Certainly I'll time you, if you wish it," said Mr. Strong, who saw how disappointed Sam was. "But it won't be a race, you know."

"I don't care—I want to show them what I can do."

"Very well."

Sam drew up to the mark and declared himself ready.

"Shall I run with you?" asked Tom. "Just to urge you on, you know?"

"All right, Tom, come on."

"Go!" cried George Strong, watch in hand and his eye on the second hand.

Away went the brothers side by side, while a cheer went up from those who had wished to see Sam win.

Tom kept close to his brother until the rounding rock was gained and here Sam compelled him to drop behind.

"Go on!" yelled Tom good-naturedly. "Go! I'm after you!" and he put on an extra spurt. Sam also spurted and kept the lead by about two yards.

"Humph! that ain't running!" muttered Lew Flapp to Rockley, but nevertheless, he was greatly disturbed.

Down the line swept the two runners with the speed of the wind, Sam keeping his two yards' lead in spite of Tom's efforts to overtake him.

"Won!" was the shout. "And Tom Rover is close behind." And then the crowd gathered around George Strong to learn the time.

"Eight seconds better than Lew Flapp!" was the cry. "And Tom Rover came in four seconds better!"

"That shows what Sam Rover would have done had Franell kept out of his way."

"The race should have gone to Sam Rover!"

So the cries kept up until Captain Putnam compelled the cadets to quiet down.

Lew Flapp and his cronies were much disgusted and left the field almost immediately.

"He's afraid to stay," declared Dick. "He doesn't want Sam to challenge him," and this was the truth.

The foot races were followed by some prize shooting, a race on the lake, and then by a tub race, and a race in sacks, which called forth much laughter, not only from the cadets, but also from the visitors.

"It was just splendid!" declared Alice Staton to Dick, when it was all over. "I never had such a lovely time in my life."

"Nor I," added her twin sister. "But your brother should have had that running race. It was a shame to knock him down."

"Never mind," said Tom, who had come up. "All the boys know he can run faster than the winner anyway."

A luncheon was served to the visitors by Captain Putnam's order and after that the cadets and their newly-made friends were allowed to go walking, boating, or driving, as they saw fit. Swings had been erected in the grove close to the encampment and these were constantly patronized.

"It must be lots of fun to be a cadet," said Alice Staton, when ready to depart. "If I was a boy I should want to go to a military academy."

"Oh, it's not all play," said Tom. "We have to work pretty hard over our studies and sometimes a fellow doesn't feel like drilling, but has to do it all the same."

It can truly be said that the Flapp crowd were much disappointed over the results of the day's contests. Only two events had been won—a boat race of small importance and the race in which Lew Flapp had come off victor, and the latter victory was dimmed by the knowledge that Sam Rover had cut down Flapp's time over the course by eight seconds.

"We may as well sell out and go home," said Pender, in deep disgust.

"But we can't go home," returned Rockley. "We've got to stay right here and take all the taunts that come along."

"Nobody shall taunt me," cried Jackson. "If they try it I'll punch somebody's nose."

"And to think we lost our money, too," said Ben Hurdy, after a pause. "That's what makes me sick."

"Reckon you didn't lose much," said Lew Flapp, with a sickly grin.

"I lost all I had, and that's enough."

"Who won it?"

"Hans Mueller. That crazy Dutch boy was yelling for Tom Rover and I took him up."

The Flapp crowd did not feel like mingling with the visitors, and at the first opportunity Lew Flapp and his intimate cronies slipped away from the camp and hurried to the hermit's den they had discovered.

"We'll have a little jollification of our own," said Rockley, and his plan was speedily carried into effect, in a fashion which would not have been approved by Captain Putnam or any of the teachers under him.

"We must get after Dick Rover," said Flapp, while smoking a black-looking cigar. "As a captain he stands pretty high. If we can pull him

down we'll be striking a blow at the whole Rover family and also at their intimate friends."

"Right you are. But the question is, How are we to get hold of him, and what are we to do?" put in Jackson.

"I've got a plan, but I don't know exactly how it will work."

"Let us have it, Lew," came from Gus Pender.

"Some dark night we'll go to Rover's tent and haul him from his cot. We'll wear masks and he'll think he's in for a bit of hazing and won't squeal very loud. Then we can blindfold him and bring him here."

"So far, so good," put in Rockley. "And after that?"

"You know how he hates liquor?"

"Does he, or is it all put on?" questioned Ben Hurdy.

"I can't say as to that, but anyway he pretends to hate it, so it amounts to the same thing. Well, after we have him here we can get him to drink something by hook or by crook, and when he falls asleep we can put an empty bottle in his hand and then somebody can bring Captain Putnam to the spot. That will wipe out Dick Rover's record as a model pupil all in a minute."

"Good!" almost shouted Rockley. "We can dose him easily. You just leave that for me."

"Wish we could get his brothers into it, too," came from Pender.

"Oh, we can serve them out some other way," answered Lew Flapp. "At the start, we don't want to bite off more than we can chew," he added slangily.

The matter was discussed for fully an hour, and when the meeting broke up each member understood fully what was to be accomplished.

Two days after the athletic contests the cadets had a prize drill. The cadets had been preparing for this for some time and each company did its best to win.

"I am greatly pleased with the showing made by all three companies," said Captain Putnam after the drilling and marching were at an end. "Companies B and C have done very well indeed. But for general excellence the average of Company A is a little above the others, so the prize must go to Captain Rover's command."

"Hurrah for Dick Rover!" was the cry, and this was followed by a cheer for First Lieutenant Powell and for Second Lieutenant Tom Rover.

"Humph! Forever cheering those Rovers!" muttered Flapp, who was in
Company C. "My, but it makes me sick!"

"Never mind," whispered Rockley. "Just wait till we get the chance to work our little game."

At once Lew Flapp's face took on a cunning look.

"I've got an idea," he whispered in return. "Why not try it on to-night? Then Captain Putnam would say Rover had been celebrating because his company won the prize."

"You are right there, Lew, I didn't think of that. Wait till I sound the other fellows."

It did not take Rockley long to talk to his cronies, and presently he came back with a knowing look on his face.

"It's settled," he said. "By to-morrow morning Dick Rover will be in disgrace and will lose his position as captain of Company A."

CHAPTER XXVII

A PRISONER OF THE ENEMY

Never dreaming of the plot hatched out against him, Dick retired as usual that night. Now that the worry over the competitive drill was a thing of the past he realized that he was worn out, and scarcely had his head touched the pillow than he was in the land of Nod.

His awakening was a rude one. He felt himself raised up, a large towel was passed over his face and tied behind his head, and then he was dragged from his cot.

"Don't dare to make a sound!" whispered a low voice in his ear. "If you do, you'll be struck senseless."

"Hullo, I'm about to be hazed," thought Dick, and it must be admitted that he was far from pleased. "They think they are going to do something grand to the captain of the company that won the prize. Well, not if I can help it," and he began to struggle to free himself.

But his tormentors were too many for him and almost before he knew it his hands and his feet were made secure and a sack was drawn over his head. Then he was raised up and carried away he knew not to where.

"One thing is certain, they are taking me a long distance from camp," was his thought, when he found himself dumped into a rowboat. "Can they be going to the head of the lake?"

The idea of using the boat had been suggested by Jackson, who said it would bewilder Dick, so he would not know where he was being taken.

And Jackson was right, the eldest Rover thought he was a long way from camp when he was placed on shore again.

His feet were now unloosed and he was made to march forward until the vicinity of the hermit's den was reached. Then he was carried into the den and tied fast to a log erected near one of the side walls.

"Take the sack from his head," came in the voice of Lew Flapp, and this was done and then the towel was also removed.

For the moment Dick could see nothing, for the glare of a large lantern was directly in his face. Then he made out half a dozen or more cadets standing around him, each with a red mask over his face, and a red skull cap with horns.

"Hullo, this must be a new secret society," he thought. "I've been initiated into the Order of Black Skulls, but never into the Order of Red Skulls. Wonder what they will want me to do?" There was a moment of silence and one of the masked cadets stepped to the front.

"Prisoner, are you prepared to meet your doom?" was the question put in a harsh voice.

"Oh, chestnuts!" cried Dick. "I went through that long ago, when I first came to Putnam Hall."

"Bow to your superiors," said another voice.

"Where are the superiors?" asked Dick innocently. "I don't see 'em."

"The prisoner is impertinent! Make him bow!"

At once several sprang behind Dick and forced him to move his head up and down.

"Let up, my head isn't on a hinge!" he cried. "Cut it short, for I'm sleepy."

"Make him drink the poison and at once!" put in another of the masked cadets.

The speaker tried to disguise his tones, but the voice sounded much like that of Lew Flapp and instantly Dick was on the alert.

"How much do you want me to drink?" he asked cheerfully.

"Only one glass, if you drink it without stopping to sneeze," put in another voice, and now Dick was certain that he recognized Rockley.

"These are no friends," he thought. "They are enemies and they intend to play me foul."

"How can I drink with my hands tied behind me?" he asked.

"We will hold the glass for you," said another, and Dick felt almost sure it was Gus Pender who uttered the words.

"It's the whole Flapp crowd," he mused. "I'm in a pickle and no mistake. I suppose they'll half kill me before they let me go."

"Will you drink?" asked another. He was small in size and Dick put him down as being Ben Hurdy.

"I want you to untie my hands."

"Very well, let the prisoner hold the glass," said Flapp.

"Thank you, Flapp."

"Who said I was Flapp?" growled the tall boy, in dismay.

"I say so."

"My name is Brown."

"All right then, Brown let it be," said Dick, not wanting to anger the bully too much.

The prisoner's hands were untied and a glass containing a dark-colored mixture was handed to him. Dick had heard of the "glass of poison" before, said glass containing nothing but mud and water well stirred up. But now he was suspicious. This glass looked as if it might contain something else.

"They'd as soon drug me as not," he thought. "For all I know this may be a dose strong enough to make an elephant sick. I don't think I'll drink it, no matter what they do."

"Prisoner, drink!" was the cry.

"Thanks, but I am not thirsty," answered Dick, as coolly as he could. "Besides, I had my dose of mud and water a long time ago."

"He must drink!" roared Rockley.

"Get the switches!" ordered Lew Flapp, and from a corner a number of long, heavy switches were brought forth and passed around.

Things began to look serious and it must be confessed that Dick's heart beat fast, for he had no desire to undergo a switching at the hands of such a cold-hearted crowd, who would be sure to lay on the strokes heavily.

"Don't you strike me," said Dick, thinking rapidly. "I'll drink fast enough. But I want to know one thing first."

"Well?"

"What are you going to do with me next?"

"Make you take the antidote for the poison," said Flapp.

"And what is that?"

"Another drink."

"They are going to drug me as sure as fate," reasoned Dick. "How can I outwit them?"

While he was deliberating there was a noise outside, as a night bird swept by the entrance to the hermit's den.

All of the masked cadets were startled and looked in that direction.

By inspiration Dick seized the moment to throw the contents of the glass over his shoulder into a dark corner. When the crowd turned back

he had the glass turned up to his mouth and was going through the movement of swallowing.

"Ugh! what ugly stuff," he said, handing the glass to one of the crowd.

"Ha! he has swallowed the poison!" cried Lew Flapp, and nudged Rockley in the ribs. "That was easy, wasn't it?" he whispered.

"Give him the second glass," muttered Rockley. "That will make him as foolish as a fiddler."

Pender already had the glass handy. He passed it to Dick, who suddenly glared at him in an uncertain manner. Dick had smelt the liquor in the first glass and now realized something of the plot to bring him to disgrace.

"Say, but that stuff makes me feel lightheaded," he said. "Wasn't so bad, after all."

"Drink this, quick," cried Flapp, more eagerly than ever.

"All right," said Dick, and spilt a little out of the glass onto the floor. "Wonder what makes my hand shake so?" he murmured.

"Take this and it will brace you up," put in Pender.

"Ha, look there!" yelled Dick, gazing fixedly at the rear of the den. "See the three-headed owl!"

All looked in the direction and again he threw the contents of the glass behind him. Then he pretended to drink, while glaring at the cadets around him.

"Funny, I can't count you any more!" he muttered. "Six, seven, ten, 'leven, nine! Say, I'm all mixed up. Who put me on the merry-go-'round anyway?" He began to stagger. "Guess I'm on a toboggan slide, ain't I?" and he acted as if he could no longer stand up-right.

"Cut him loose, fellows!" cried Flapp, and this was done, and Dick staggered to the table, clutched it, slid to the floor and acted as if he had fallen into a deep sleep.

"Say, that was dead easy!" cried Pender gleefully. "Took the stuff like a lamb."

"What's to do next, Flapp?" asked Jackson.

"Say, Jackson, don't speak my name, please," cried the tall boy in alarm.

"Oh, what's the odds," put in Pender. "Rover is dead to the world. Rockley knew just how to fix those doses."

"That's right, Gus," came from Rockley.

"We had better not lose time here," went on Flapp presently. "Let us tell Captain Putnam without delay. He'll have Rover brought back to camp just as he is, and that will disgrace him forever."

"Wait till I put the empty bottle near him," said Rockley, and this was done.

Then the crowd of masked cadets left the den, leaving the door wide open behind them.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DICK'S MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

A minute after the last of Lew Flapp's crowd left the hermit's den Dick leaped to his feet, went to the doorway, and listened intently. It was quite dark, so he could see little or nothing.

At a distance he heard the masked cadets stealing swiftly along through the woods. They had put out the lantern, knowing the road fairly well through repeated excursions to the den. Soon the crowd was completely out of hearing.

It must be confessed that Dick felt lonely, and almost the first thing he did was to take a match from his pocket and strike it. Discovering a bit of candle on the table he lighted this also.

But little was to be seen outside of that which had already met his gaze. The hermit's den had been cleaned up around the table, on which rested half a dozen bottles, an empty cigar box, and several packs of cards.

"This must be the stuff those fellows bought in Oakville," thought the eldest Rover. "They have been using this cave for a regular club room. What a beastly crowd they are! And they really imagine they are having good times, too!"

As will be remembered, Dick had been given a trip on a rowboat before being brought into the den and he imagined that he was somewhere near the head of Bass Lake, how far from the camp he could not tell.

"Perhaps I'm near where Tom and the others met those snakes," he mused. "Ugh! I don't want to fall in with things like that. And how I am to get back to camp without a boat is more than I can settle."

Blowing out the bit of candle, he placed it in his pocket and left the den. On all sides were the thick bushes already described, and poor Dick knew not which way to turn. He listened once more, but hardly a sound broke the midnight silence.

"Might as well strike out as to stay here," he said. "I don't think they'll come back in very much of a hurry, and perhaps they won't come until morning."

Pushing his way through the bushes he at last reached a tiny stream that poured over the rocks. He followed the stream and after half an hour's hard walking reached the edge of the lake. He had journeyed directly away from the camp and was now in a spot that was lonely in the extreme.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the water at this point was very shallow and soon Dick was wading over to what he took to be the island upon which the encampment had been located. But as a matter of fact he was headed for the main shore of the lake, and soon he was tramping further away from the camp than ever. For once in his life, so far as his bump of locality was concerned, Dick was hopelessly mixed.

Dick traveled nearly a mile before he reached the conclusion that he was not on Pine Island or anywhere near it.

"I'm on the mainland, that's certain," he told himself. "I guess the best thing I can do is to wait for daylight before going further. I may only—Hullo, a light!"

Dick had emerged from a grove of trees and now saw a light streaming from the window of a cottage but a short distance away. The sight of this caused him to breathe a sigh of relief.

"Some farmer's place, I suppose," he murmured. "Well, anything will do. I can get a place to sleep, and the farmer can testify to it that I haven't been drinking, as Lew Flapp and his cronies will want to prove."

A curtain was drawn over the window of the cottage, so that Dick could not see into the room. The cottage was small, with but a single doors and on this the youth rapped loudly.

The rapping was followed by a commotion inside of the cottage and Dick heard two persons leap to their feet.

"Who's there?" demanded a rough voice.

"A stranger," Dick answered. "I have lost my way in the darkness," and without waiting he tried the door, and finding it unlocked, opened it.

"Dick Rover!"

The cry came from one of the occupants of the room, a tall, awkward-looking young man, much tanned by exposure, and with a pair of dark and wicked-looking eyes.

"Great Scott!" gasped Dick, falling back a step. "Am I dreaming or is this really Dan Baxter?"

"Oh. I'm Dan Baxter right enough," answered the former bully of Putnam
Hall.

"But—but I thought you were still on that island in the Pacific."

"You wanted to see me end my days there, didn't you?" sneered Dan Baxter.

Dick did not reply, for he was gazing at the other occupant of the room, a man with a short crop of hair and a short beard.

"And your father, too!" he murmured.

"Come in here," cried Arnold Baxter savagely and caught him by the arm.
"Are you alone?"

"Yes," answered Dick, before he had stopped to think twice.

"Good enough. Come in," and Arnold Baxter continued to hold him.

"He may be fooling us, dad," put in Dan Baxter. "The officers of the law may be with him."

"Take a look around and see, Dan. I'll keep him here."

"Let me go!" cried Dick, trying to break away.

"Not much, Rover. You'll stay right where you are for the present," answered the older Baxter grimly.

Dan had slipped out and he made a thorough search before returning to the cottage. In the meantime Dick was forced to sit down on a bench in a corner, while Arnold Baxter stood over him with a stout club.

"This is getting interesting, to say the least," thought Dick. "I wish I hadn't come anywhere near the cottage."

"Nobody around," announced Dan Baxter, as he came in and closed and locked the door.

"Good," answered his father. He turned again to Dick. "Now, how comes it that you are wandering around here, Rover?" he went on.

"I was trying to find my way back to camp and lost my way in the woods."

"But your camp is on an island."

"I know it. I was carried off by some students who were hazing me. They put a bag over my head and took me in a boat, and I got mixed up.

"I hope they hazed you good," came from Dan Baxter with a malicious grin.

"Thank you, Dan, you always were a real friend," returned Dick, as coolly as he could.

"Oh, don't you come any of that game over me!" roared Dan Baxter. "I haven't forgotten the past, Dick Rover, and you'll find it out so before I get through with you. I was just hoping you or your precious brothers might drop into my arms."

"What are you and your father doing here?"

"That is my business," broke in Arnold Baxter.

"I don't see why you fellows can't turn over a new leaf," went on Dick earnestly.

"Oh, don't preach, Dick Rover," answered Dan Baxter. "You make me sick when you do that."

"I suppose you find this a good hiding place."

"It has been—up to now," said Arnold Baxter. "But since you have discovered us—" he did not finish.

"We'll make him pay for it," said Dan Baxter. "I've been waiting to square accounts for a long time."

"How did you escape from that island, Dan?" asked Dick curiously.

"A ship came along about a week after you left it."

"I see. And did you come right through to here?"

"That is my business, Dick Rover. But I came to help my father, I don't mind telling you that."

"Then you knew he had escaped from prison?"

"From the hospital, yes."

"And did you know he had robbed our house?"

"He took what belonged to him, Dick Rover. Your folks robbed him of that mine in the West."

"Well, I won't argue the point, Dan Baxter." Dick got up and moved toward the door. "I think I'll go."

"Will you!" cried both of the Baxters, in a breath, and seizing him they forced him back into the corner.

"Let us make him a prisoner," went on Dan Baxter, and this was speedily done by aid of a rope which the elder Baxter brought forth. Then Dick was thrown into a closet of an inner apartment and the door was locked upon him.

CHAPTER XXIX

TRUE HEROISM

"Well, one thing is certain, I am much worse off now than I was when in the hands of Lew Flapp's crowd," thought Dick dismally, after trying in vain to break the bonds that bound him.

The closet in which he was a prisoner was so small that he could scarcely turn himself. The door was a thick one, so to break it down was out of the question.

"Stop your row in there!" called out Dan Baxter presently. "If you don't, I'll give you something you won't want."

"How long are you going to keep me here?"

"If you wait long enough you'll find out," was the unsatisfactory answer.

"It won't do you any good to keep me a prisoner, Dan."

"Won't it? Perhaps you think I'm going to let you go so that you can get the officers to arrest my father," sneered the younger Baxter.

"They are bound to get him anyway, sooner or later."

"They'll never get him if they don't catch him this week."

"Why? Is he going to leave the country?"

"That's his business, not yours," said Dan Baxter, and walked away.

"It's too bad he turned up as he did," remarked Arnold Baxter, when he found himself alone with his son. "I thought I'd be safe here until I could slip over to Boston."

"When does that steamer sail for Cape Town, Africa, dad?"

"Tuesday or Wednesday of next week."

"Then all we can do is to keep Dick Rover a prisoner until that time."

"We can't do it, Dan. As soon as he is reported missing this whole vicinity will be searched."

"Do you think they'll find this cottage?"

"Perhaps, although so far I have not been disturbed."

"Tom and Sam Rover came pretty close to locating you, didn't they?"

"They came within half a mile of the spot. But I gave them the slip."

"I wish I could square up with all of the Rovers," went on Dan Baxter savagely. "They have caused me no end of trouble."

"Better leave them alone, Dan. Every time you try to do something you get your fingers burnt."

To this the son could not answer, for he knew that his father spoke the truth.

A long talk followed, and then Dan Baxter left, promising to return before noon of the next day. He was to proceed to a town about twelve miles away and there purchase for his father a new suit of clothing and a preparation for dyeing his hair and beard. With this disguise Arnold Baxter hoped to get away from the vicinity and reach Boston without being recognized.

So far the night had been clear, but now a storm was brewing. From a great distance came a rumble of thunder and occasionally a glimpse of lightning lit up the landscape.

"You'll have a bad journey of it," said Arnold Baxter to his son as the latter was leaving.

"Reckon I'll have to make the best of it," answered Dan. "But I've got used to such things, since I've been knocking around the ocean and elsewhere."

Left to himself, Arnold Baxter paced the floor of the cottage uneasily. Age was beginning to tell upon him and he was by no means the man he was when introduced to the Rovers years before.

"I wish I was out of it," he murmured to himself. "I'd give a good deal to be on the ocean this minute, bound for some place where I can make a fresh start."

The storm kept growing in violence until the cottage fairly shook from the fury of the wind. There was much thunder and lightning, with some crashing in the woods close at hand, that caused both Baxter and Dick to start in alarm.

Dick was doing his best to free himself and at last managed to get one hand loose.

He had already found that to attempt forcing the door was useless. Now he tried the walls of the closet and then the flooring and the ceiling.

He was much gratified to find that the boards of the ceiling were not fastened down. With a great effort he managed to raise himself and after a minute of hard work found himself in the tiny loft of the cottage. Here the patter of the rain was strong and the water was leaking in everywhere.

"I'll have to drop to the ground and run for it," he told himself, and crawled to where there was a tiny window just large enough to admit the passage of his body.

It was no easy matter to get down to the ground with one hand still fastened behind him, and Dick made rather slow work of it. The rain beat in at the window, and soon he was soaked to the skin.

Where to go next he did not know. To journey far in such a storm was entirely out of the question.

Dick had hardly gotten to the edge of the woods when a blinding flash of lightning and a ripping crash of thunder fairly lifted him from his feet.

"Oh!" he gasped, and staggered to a tree for support. "My, but that was close!"

It was not until a moment later that he realized what had occurred. The lightning had struck the cottage, ripping off a corner of the roof and descending into the room below. The structure was now a mass of flames.

"The cottage is on fire!" murmured the youth. "Wonder if the Baxters have been struck?"

The wind quickly drove the fire in all directions until the cottage was in flames almost from end to end.

Staggering from the effects of the shock, Dick drew closer to the building and then tried the door, to find it locked.

"Help!" came faintly, in Arnold Baxter's voice. "Help!"

"Open the door," returned Dick, forgetting that it was an enemy who was calling for assistance.

"I—I cannot. I—I am helpless!"

Again Dick tried the door, but without success. Then he leaped for the window. Some of the glass was broken, and with his naked fist he drove in the whole sash, and tore down the flapping curtain.

The sight which met his gaze filled him with horror. The room was on fire in several places and in a corner, near the chimney piece, rested Arnold Baxter, pinned down by a section of brick and stonework that had fallen. He had been hit in the head, and from the wound the blood was flowing.

"Rover, is that you?" he cried faintly. "Don't desert me!"

Without replying, Dick began to crawl in through the broken window. The air was filled with smoke and he could scarcely see what he was doing. The sparks, too, were flying in all directions and only the wetness of his garments kept them from catching fire.

He was soon at Arnold Baxter's side, and with his one free hand hurled the bricks and stones in all directions. As he worked the fire kept coming closer, until his face was fairly blistered by the conflagration.

At last the man was free. But he could not raise himself up, and when Dick did it Arnold Baxter fell a limp form in his arm. He had fainted.

Mustering up all the strength that remained to him, Dick dragged the unconscious man to the door. There was a bar to be flung aside and then Dick threw the barrier wide open. It was none too soon, for now the fire was swirling in all directions. Staggering beneath his burden the youth hurried into the open and then fell flat, with Arnold Baxter beside him.

"What a close call!" murmured Dick, when he was able to rise. He felt weak in the knees, and his hands and face smarted from the blistering received. He looked at Arnold Baxter. The man had not yet recovered and looked to be more dead than alive.

Dick remembered having crossed a brook but a short distance away, and to this he went and bathed his burns and brought some water back for Arnold Baxter. His other hand had now become free, so he could work to much better advantage.

"He has been seriously hurt, that is certain," thought the youth. "Perhaps he breathed in some of the flames. If he did that he may never get over it."

Left to itself the cottage burnt to the ground and then the falling rain put out the hissing embers. In the meantime Dick did what he could to restore Arnold Baxter to consciousness, and at last had the satisfaction of seeing the man open his eyes.

"Oh!" murmured the man. "The fire—"

"You are out of it," answered Dick soothingly.

"Did you—did you haul me out?"

"Yes."

"It was good of you to do it, Rover," said Arnold Baxter, and then he fainted once more.

CHAPTER XXX

TURNING A NEW LEAF—CONCLUSION

The night was a long one for Dick Rover and he was glad when the storm cleared away and the first streaks of dawn began to show themselves in the eastern sky.

Arnold Baxter had recovered consciousness, but was evidently in great pain, for he moaned almost constantly. Dick was willing to aid the sufferer, yet could do little or nothing.

"Tell me the way to our camp and I will get help," said Dick at last. And Arnold Baxter gave him the directions as best he could.

"I must have a doctor," whispered the man hoarsely. "If not, I'll surely die. And I don't want to die yet, Rover!"

As well as he was able, Dick set off for the lake shore and then began to move in the direction of Bass Island.

He had not gone very far when he heard somebody calling his name.

"Rover! Dick Rover!" was the cry. "Dick Rover!"

"It must be a searching party," he thought, and he was right. The party contained Tom and Sam, and Mr. Strong, and they said that two other parties were out, one headed by Captain Putnam and the other by an assistant.

"Where in the world have you been?" asked Tom. "We have been scared almost to death over your absence."

"It's a long story," answered Dick. "What I want just now is a doctor and a lot of salve. Just look at me, will you?"

"Blisters!" ejaculated Sam. "Where did you get those?"

"In a fire that nearly burnt Arnold Baxter to death. I want the doctor for him."

And then Dick had to tell the particulars of how he had run across the cottage in the woods and of what had followed.

"And Dan Baxter is here!" ejaculated Tom. "It doesn't seem possible."

"He ought to be locked up," put in Sam.

It was decided by Mr. Strong that Arnold Baxter should be removed to the camp on a stretcher, and four boys, including Sam and Tom, volunteered for the service. In the meantime Dick went to camp, to attend to his hurts, and a cadet was sent to Oakville for a doctor.

"Hullo, here comes Rover!" whispered Lew Flapp to Pender, as Dick appeared. "Wonder what sort of a story he will have to tell?"

"One thing is certain, we made a mess of our plans," muttered Pender.

"Perhaps Rover won't give us away," put in Rockley hopefully.

On returning to camp word had been sent to Captain Putnam that Dick Rover was at the den in a condition not fit to be seen.

Mr. Strong and another teacher had gone to the place mentioned in the anonymous communication only to find the den empty.

A general alarm was sent out, and the search for the missing captain of Company A was begun as recorded. Captain Putnam also began to investigate on his private account, with results that were as surprising as they were dismaying. He learned the several cadets had left camp early in the night and among them Ben Hurdy, Lew Flapp, Pender, and Jackson. Without delay he summoned Ben Hurdy to his private tent and made the young cadet undergo a strict cross-examination.

At first Hurdy would not talk, but soon he became frightened and broke down utterly. He told of the plot against Dick, and of how Flapp and the others had carried it out.

"I didn't want to go into it," he whined. "But Flapp said he would thrash me if I didn't do my share. They wanted to get square with Captain Rover because he had won at the athletic contests and at the drill."

"I see," said Captain Putnam grimly, and then he ordered Ben Hurdy to keep absolutely silent until called on to speak. "If you say a word now I'll dismiss you at once," he concluded.

When Dick arrived Captain Putnam saw to it that his blisters were dressed with care, and then he asked the eldest Rover to tell his whole story.

"I do not know as I can do that, Captain Putnam," said the young captain, blushing. "I don't care to become a tale-bearer."

"Did you leave camp of your own free will, Rover?"

"I did not, sir."

"You were carried away to be hazed, then?"

"Yes, sir; but I would prefer not to speak of that part of my adventures."

"Those who carried you off drugged you."

"How do you know that?" asked Dick, in surprise.

"Never mind that now, Rover. Did they drug you or not?"

"No, sir."

"What!"

"They tried to drug me, but I threw the liquor over my shoulder when they weren't looking."

"Oh, I see," and Captain Putnam smiled. "They tried to trick you and you ended by tricking them, is that it?"

"That's about the size of it, sir. They thought I was in a stupor when they left me, but as soon as they were gone I began to shift for myself. But I don't understand how you know about this, Captain Putnam."

"One of the party to this outrage has confessed, so I know all about it, Rover. The leader, I believe, was Lew Flapp, and his main supporters were Pender, Rockley, and Jackson."

To this Dick did not say a word.

"I know you would speak if I were accusing anybody wrongly, Rover. In one way I can appreciate your silence. But this affair was carried too far. It was not an ordinary hazing. The plot was one to blast your honest name and bring you into disgrace. Such things cannot be permitted at any school of which I am the head. I will hear the rest of your strange tale."

In as few words as possible Dick told how he had wandered around until he had reached the cottage, and what had happened afterward.

"It was assuredly a remarkable adventure," said Captain Putnam. "I thought I had about seen the last of Daniel Baxter."

"Perhaps Dan Baxter will keep shady when he finds out what has happened."

"Perhaps. And you think Arnold Baxter is in a bad way?"

"Yes, sir. He came pretty close to being burnt up."

"We will do our best for him, and notify the authorities without delay."

An hour later the disabled man was brought into camp and the doctor came to attend him.

Under the physician's directions Arnold Baxter was made fairly comfortable in one of the tents of the camp.

"He is in a bad way," said the doctor. "He will probably recover, but it will take weeks and perhaps months."

Arnold Baxter asked for Dick and the eldest Rover went in to see him.

"I—I want to thank you for what you did, Rover," said the criminal in a low voice. "It—it was noble, very noble. I shan't forget it."

"Mr. Baxter, why don't you try to turn over a new leaf?" questioned Dick. "Haven't you found out that it doesn't pay to be bad?"

"Yes, I have found it out, and the lesson has been dearly bought," said Arnold Baxter with a sigh. "In the future I shall try to—to do better. Here, I want you to give these to your father, and tell him I—I am sorry that I visited your house some time ago," went on the disabled man.

He gave Dick an envelope containing some pawn tickets which called for the things stolen from the Rover homestead, and also a pocketbook with some money in it.

"That is all I have left of the cash," he said. "I'm sorry I haven't every cent of it. Tell him he can do as he pleases about me. I deserve no pity."

"I think he'd like to see you turn over a new leaf, too. He hates to see people on the downward path, Mr. Baxter."

"You are a good boy, Dick Rover. I am sorry that my son Dan isn't like you. Has he been caught yet?"

"I believe not."

"If he is caught, let me know," concluded Arnold Baxter, and there the talk ended.

"I imagine he really intends to turn over a new leaf," said Dick to Tom and Sam, a little later.

"Hope he does," replied Tom.

"So do I," added Sam.

Let me add a few words more and then bring this story of life in camp to a conclusion.

On the day following Dick's return to camp Captain Putnam summoned Lew
Flapp, Pender, Rockley, and Jackson before him.

"I presume you know why I have sent for you," said the captain briefly. "Since the disappearance of Captain Rover I have been making an investigation. Rover himself would not talk, but others have spoken, and Rover has not denied the truth. All of you have been guilty of such serious misconduct that to overlook it would be almost criminal on my part."

"What have I done?" asked Lew Flapp brazenly.

"You have earned your dismissal from Putnam Hall, Flapp, and you leave this camp as soon as arrangements can be made."

"Going to fire me out, eh?"

"You are dismissed. I will not allow such a boy as you to mingle longer with the rest of my pupils."

"What are you going to do with the others? I wasn't to blame alone."

"Pender, Rockley, and Jackson shall go, too. The others, including Hurdy, shall have another chance, for I believe they were dragged into the affair unwillingly by you and your particular cronies."

"If we have got to go, don't let's listen to any more gas," growled Rockley, and stalked away with a very white face, followed by Flapp. Pender and Jackson pleaded for another chance, but Captain Putnam would not listen, and in the end the evil-minded cadets had to leave the school, never to return.

"Putnam Hall is well rid of that crowd," said Songbird Powell, and the majority of the students agreed with him.

Munro Staton, the local constable, was much chagrined to think that he had not had a hand in finding Arnold Baxter, and he at once set out to locate Dan. But Dan Baxter knew enough to leave the vicinity, and that was the last heard of him for some time.

Through the pawn tickets given to Dick, Mr. Anderson Rover recovered the spoons, napkin rings and other things taken from the homestead by Arnold Baxter. Mr. Rover visited Baxter before the latter was returned to the hospital from which he had escaped.

"I believe the man really intends to reform," said Anderson Rover afterwards. "But he is in a bad condition physically and may die before his term of imprisonment is at an end."

"I hope he lives," said Sam. "I'd like to see him lead an upright, honest life."

"I don't think we'll be bothered much with Dan Baxter after this," said Tom, but he was mistaken, Dan Baxter bothered them a great deal, and so did Lew Flapp, and how will be told in the next volume of this series, to be entitled, "The Rover Boys on the River; Or, The Search for the Missing Houseboat," in which we shall meet our old friends in a series of adventures as interesting as those already related.

As was the custom at Putnam Hall the encampment came to an end on the Fourth of July. This was a gala day for the cadets and they were allowed to invite both friends and relatives to the affair.

The Rover boys had the Statons over and also had their father and their
Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha participate.

"Never saw such a time in my life!" declared Aunt Martha. "Music and marching, and such fireworks! And such a spread out under the trees! No wonder our boys like to go to Putnam Hall."

"It's a good place for them," came from the father of the boys. "It is making good men of them."

After the fireworks big bonfires were lit, and the cadets were allowed to do pretty much as they pleased. As they gathered around the largest of the fires all joined hands in a big circle, and it was Tom who started the Putnam Hall cheer:

"Zip, boom, bang! Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Boom, bang, bang! Hurrah for
Putnam Hall!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" came from all sides; and here let us say good-by.

THE END

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